

Traditiones

53 | 2 | 2024

TRADITIONES
TRADITIONES
TRADITIONES



ISSN 0352-0447 (tisk / print) | ISSN 1855-6396 (splet / online)

TRADITIONES

Zbornik Inštituta za slovensko narodopisje in Glasbenonarodopisnega inštituta
Znanstvenoraziskovalnega centra Slovenske akademije znanosti in umetnosti / Journal of the Institute
of Slovenian Ethnology and Institute of Ethnomusicology at the Research Centre of the Slovenian
Academy of Sciences and Arts

Glavni in odgovorni urednik / Editor-in-Chief

Miha Kozorog

Glavni urednici / Chief Editors

Tatiana Bajuk Senčar, Rebeka Kunej

Gostujoča urednika / Guest Editors

Dan Podjed, Lana Peternel

Uredniški odbor / Editorial Board

Saša Babič, Barbara Ivančič Kutin, Mojca Kovačič, Drago Kunej, Rok Mrvič, Marjeta Pisk, Dan Podjed

Mednarodni uredniški svet / International Editorial Council

Regina Bendix (Georg-August-Universität Göttingen), Tatiana Bužeková (Univerzita Komenského),
Jurij Fikfak (ZRC SAZU), Valentina Gulin Zrnič (Institut za etnologiju i folkloristiku), Lojze Lebič (SAZU),
Helena Ložar – Podlogar (ZRC SAZU), Maria Małanicz-Przybylska (Uniwersytet Warszawski), Susana
Sardo (Universidade de Aveiro), Ingrid Slavec Gradišnik (ZRC SAZU), Jaro Stacul (Memorial University
of Newfoundland), Marija Stanonik (SAZU), Kendra Stepputat (Kunstuniversität Graz), Maruška Svašek
(Queen's University Belfast), David Verbuč (Univerzita Karlova)

Naslov uredništva / Editorial Address

Traditiones, ZRC SAZU, Novi trg 2, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenija

Spletna stran / Website: <http://ojs.zrc-sazu.si/traditiones>

Založnika / Publishers

Založba ZRC in / and Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti /

Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts

Letna naročnina / Annual Subscription

Za posameznike 30 €, za ustanove 90 €, za študente 15 €; posamična številka: za posameznike 15 €, za
ustanove 40 €. Revija izhaja letno v treh zvezkih. / 30 € for individuals, 90 € for institutions, 15 € for students;
Single issue: 15 € for individuals, 40 € for institutions. The journal is published yearly in three issues.

Naročila / Orders

Založba ZRC, Novi trg 2, SI-1001 Ljubljana, Slovenija, e-pošta / e-mail: narocanje@zrc-sazu.si

Tisk / Printed by

CICERO, Begunje, d. o. o.

Naklada / Print Run

400

Copyright 2024 avtorji



Revija *Traditiones* je vključena v naslednje podatkovne zbirke / The Journal *Traditiones* is included
in the following databases: Anthropological Index Online; ERIH – European Reference Index for the
Humanities; FRANCIS – Institut de l'information scientifique et techniques (CNRS); IBZ – International
Bibliography of Periodical Literature in the Humanities and Social Sciences); MLA International
Bibliography; Ulrich's International Periodical Directory; Scopus.

Revija izhaja s pomočjo Javne agencije za znanstvenoraziskovalno in inovacijsko dejavnost Republike
Slovenije. / The Journal is published with the support of the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency.

Traditiones

53 | 2 | 2024

TRADITIONES



ZRC SAZU



Vsebina / Contents

OBRAZI IZOLACIJE THE FACES OF ISOLATION

Gostujoča urednika / Guest Editors: Dan Podjed, Lana Peternel

- Dan Podjed, Lana Peternel
7 The Power of Isolation (*Moč izolacije*)
- Špela Ledinek Lozej
19 Isolation and Connectedness in the Bohinj Alps: Experiences of a *Majerca* (*Izolacija in povezljivost v bohinjskih planinah: izkušnje majerce*)
- Nikolina Hazdovac Bajić
37 Floating Homes: Homemaking Practices among Seafarers as Strategies against Isolation (*Plavajoči domovi: prakse ustvarjanja doma med pomorščaki kot protizolacijske strategije*)
- Peter Simonič
63 The Island of Žirje: Challenging Claims of Isolation (*Otok Žirje: spodbijanje trditev o izolaciji*)
- Ana Perinić Lewis
93 Connected by Sea, Isolated by Water: Water and Water Supply Infrastructure on Two Croatian Islands (*Povezani z vodo, izolirani zaradi vode: voda in oskrba z vodo na dveh hrvaških otokih*)
- Katarina Polajnar Horvat
121 Revitalizing Robidišče: Navigating the Challenges and Opportunities of Marginalized Rural Communities (*Revitalizacija Robidišča: premagovanje izzivov in priložnosti obrobnih podeželskih skupnosti*)
- Maruška Svašek
145 Lockdown Friend (*Lockdown Friend*)

OBRAZI IZOLACIJE



THE FACES OF ISOLATION

The Power of Isolation

Dan Podjed

ZRC SAZU, Institute of Slovenian Ethnology, Slovenia
dan.podjed@zrc-sazu.si
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1914-6053>

Lana Peternel

Institute for Social Research, Croatia
lanapeternel@idi.hr
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7749-3075>

This article investigates isolation as a complex physical and symbolic phenomenon. The studies presented in the article and in this special issue explore how isolation impacts identities, social cohesion, and community life – especially in times of ongoing and interconnected crises. The authors examine the multifaceted nature of isolation that informs daily practices, emotional wellbeing, and community bonds, offering insights into the challenges and resilience seen in isolated communities.

▪ **Keywords:** isolation, crisis, ethnography, community, individual, resilience

V članku je predstavljena kompleksnost izolacije kot fizičnega in simbolnega pojava. Povzeta so spoznanja večletnih raziskav, ki so objavljena v zvezku te revije. Raziskovalci so preučevali vpliv izolacije na identitete, družbeno kohezijo in življenje v skupnosti, še posebej v času stalnih in prepletenih kriz, ter razkrili večplastnost izolacije, ki vpliva na vsakdanje prakse, čustveno počutje in vezi v skupnostih ter ponuja vpogled v izzive in odpornost izoliranih skupnosti.

▪ **Ključne besede:** izolacija, kriza, etnografija, skupnost, posameznik, odpornost

Introduction

“*You can't believe it!*” This was often the exclamation that rang out when anthropologists arrived at one of the remote places where people had created a life out of nothing in complete isolation. Amazement, whether in a positive or negative sense, was almost always the first reaction during the fieldwork, where we focused on the concept of isolation in its actual and physical meaning as well as in its symbolic and cultural sense, and endeavored to explore isolation as a multi-layered and changing phenomenon. Etymologically, the adjective ‘isolated’ means “standing detached from others of its kind” (OED, 2024). In the 18th century, the word was transferred into English from French *isolé*, from Italian *isolato*, and from Latin *insulatus* (made into an island), and *insula* (island). However, the contemporary definitions and studies of the term, presented in this article and used to explain the diversity of isolation, encompass new aspects and dimensions, including ethical, aesthetic, and political, which underline the need for a more precise theoretical framework, presented in this text and other articles of the special issue of *Traditiones*.



During the three years of ethnographic research, our focus was on isolation and understanding this specific condition as a transformative force of cultural and social change. While carrying out the research, we became more and more convinced that while the ethnological and anthropological literature offers a rich understanding of the term, this concept of isolation has several new meanings and analytical potential in the current era of post-pandemics. Therefore, the project team initially sought to redefine the problem of isolation by focusing on the personal experiences, values and everyday lives of people experiencing isolation beyond the global crisis, and through time it got several new insights and perspectives, which are presented in this issue.

What has happened during our research that shifted our perspective? The pandemic that swept the world in 2020 and significantly transformed people's everyday lives was an important impetus for our research. From a distance of just a few years, that time, which could also be called the *meantime* or *in-between time* (Podjed, 2023), seems rather enigmatic, especially from an ethnological and anthropological point of view. In a period when the rule to “stay home” or “keep a social distance” was often in force, and when people avoided contact with each other, new habits, such as greeting friends and acquaintances with a fist bump and a show of hands from a distance, wearing a protective mask, and opening the door with the elbow instead of by hand, were quickly and unexpectedly internalized (see, for example, Podjed, 2020). At that time, we did not seek isolation then, it found us instead. But 2020 also marked the beginning of a “polycrisis” (Henig, Knight, 2023), a “permacrisis” (Collins, 2024), a “catacrisis” (Klepec, 2024) or a “permanent crisis”, i.e., a period in which crisis is no longer an emergency but a regular state of the world and society.

After the official cancellation of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2022, the media spotlight shifted first to Ukraine, where the war is still raging, and then to another global hotspot, Gaza, where tens of thousands of people have died in a massacre. In Croatia, where the project's field research commenced in early 2023, a natural disaster had taken place at the end of 2020. A devastating earthquake in the Banija region destroyed tens of thousands of homes, opening old wounds of the war from the nineties, leaving again displaced individuals to seek shelter in temporary container housing and camps (Peternel, Podjed, 2024). In Slovenia, devastation of similar proportions occurred in August 2023, when a storm hit a large part of the country, and floods and landslides caused economic damage that some estimate at almost €10 billion, with social and psychosocial consequences that are certain to last for years or decades to come.

During two years of research in remote and devastated areas, we reveal isolation as a central metaphor for a society in a crisis. This starting point resonates deeply with diverse subthemes we grasped in the research project *Isolated People and Communities* in Slovenia and Croatia granted by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency and the Croatian Science Foundation. The researches in the project address the real-life experiences of people living in both physical and social isolation, whether in remote

rural areas or on the fringes of urban centers. In them, the research team has put attention on two dimensions of isolation: the one that stems from geographical remoteness and the decline of communities, and the other that emerges within modern, overcrowded lifestyles, where individuals yearn for a break and withdrawal from daily obligations. However, the project has not only investigated physical isolation but also delved into the cultural, emotional, and social dimensions of the phenomenon, aiming to better understand the challenges faced by isolated communities in Slovenia and Croatia. In short: it has explored how the experiences of isolation shape personal and collective identities and how they influence the sense of belonging and social cohesion in times of ongoing crises.

Isolation as a fundamental concept

Constant crises have resulted in increased isolation, alienation, and loneliness of the people we visited in the field. At the same time, we have had the opportunity to learn about the other “faces” of isolation, which have always been an important, but apparently somewhat forgotten dimensions of this concept in anthropological and ethnological research. In fact, the term ‘isolation’ actually demarcated and defined the birth of anthropology (Bille et al., 2010; Kottak, 2017). From the beginning of the discipline, the cultural patterns of isolated communities have been analyzed to better understand the social and cultural practices of non-isolated communities (Manners, 1965; Geertz, 1983; Kociatkiewicz, Kostera, 1999; Eriksen, 2001; Horst, Miller, 2006; Dawdy, 2010; Argenti, 2019). From kinship, social structures, economic practices, and mythology to digital communication or social networks, isolated communities and individuals reflected globalization processes (Baldacchino, 2006, 2008; Gössling, Wall, 2007; Royle, 2007; Argenti, 2019; Ma, 2020). Anthropological interpretations determine people’s responses to isolation in empty urban and rural spaces, characterized either by the negative experience of loneliness and insularity or by positive inspiration and creative engagement (Sassen, 2005; Carsten, 2007; Kozorog, 2013; Petrović et al., 2020).

In addition to isolation, there are some basic concepts that we use in this issue. One is insularity, which defines separation from other communities (Simonič, 2017). The other is emptiness, which often describes depopulated urban and rural areas created by political, economic, and social changes that significantly alter population and spatial structures (Woolfson, 2010; Dzenovska, 2018, 2020). These terms and others connected to isolation – for example, loneliness, solitude, etc. – are often ambiguous. In some contexts, isolation negatively impacts demographic and spatial changes that are increasingly evident in social and cultural practices in the current global environmental and health crises. On the other hand, in times of digitalization and hyper-consumption,



people have often experienced information overload and, more than in the past, have begun to search for a meaningful life in isolated spaces in order to find solitude as a positive “face” of isolation, identify new values and find better prospects for themselves.

From an anthropological perspective, emptiness is often defined as desolation or lack of life and activity in space (Munn, 1996). Moreover, it is also a rich source of meanings associated with physical isolation and a distinct sense of withdrawal (Dzenovska, 2011; Driessen, 2018; Dzenovska, De Genova, 2018; Gupta, 2018). Therefore, the next step of our research – beyond the state-of-the-art – is to examine the notions within and between isolated communities in different cultural, historical, and socio-political contexts, and to ask what advantages and disadvantages isolation has or has historically had.

Anthropological research on isolation presented in this issue of *Traditiones* shows that understanding isolated people and communities requires a detailed ethnographic approach that re-examines everyday practices, values, and notions of time, place, and identity – as well as people’s own biases and experiences (Burawoy, Verdery, 1999; Kottak, 2017; Drazin, 2018; Dzenovska, De Genova, 2018). Social science studies have confirmed that isolation is related to mental health, poverty, inequality, marginalization, and shame due to failure to meet personal expectations (Leavey et al., 2007; Tilki et al., 2009). From this perspective, isolation is not about emptiness and seclusion. Rather, it is related to individual perceptions of belonging and passage of time (see Phillipson et al., 2001; Askham et al., 2007). Drawing on our research into various forms and processes of isolation, from degrading to healing strategies in everyday life, we discuss that isolation represents a significant social challenge. This challenge carries negative implications for the physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of daily life, affecting individuals and communities alike, whether in remote mountainous areas or on the outskirts of bustling cities. For us, as anthropologists immersed in this project, isolation manifests in both abandonment and overcrowding, in moments of yearning for rest or inner peace, as well as in the need for understanding and daily connection. On a deeper existential level, crises are not solely tied to external political, demographic, or economic factors; they are also shaped by one’s internal experience of the world and their own sense of place within it. Regardless of whether one is surrounded by the silence of the mountains or the chaos of urban life, the sense of isolation remains omnipresent amid the overwhelming crises of our time. Additionally, isolation takes on a temporal dimension as well, both as a result of recent natural disasters – earthquakes, fires, and floods, which we, unfortunately, witness all too frequently – and as the long-term consequence of wars and the suffering of people in conflict zones.

Studies presented in this issue have confirmed that types of isolation differ at interpersonal and community levels. However, according to the criteria of non-isolated people, a prosperous life in isolation requires much more sacrifice than in other parts of Slovenia or Croatia. For example, a successful private entrepreneurship in isolated,

depopulated areas requires an uneven distribution of individual investment and social and political care (Thrift, 2000; Petrović et al., 2020). Various studies also show that economic prosperity in isolation occurs because of extraordinary sacrifice of comforts and conveniences (Howes, 1991; Caruth, 1996; Navaro-Yasin, 2009).

In the former socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the emptiness and potential revitalization of isolated spaces are often misunderstood and represented by extreme examples and stereotypes. A positive stereotypical example is a successful individual, usually a better educated man, whose entrepreneurial initiative became a common case of a successful revitalization strategy. At the same time, a negative stereotypical story presents an elderly woman living alone in an empty village or in a remote place in Alpine area. Both presented stereotypes consequently demonstrate feminization and senilization of isolated and rural areas due to the migration patterns (Dzenovska, 2020; Dugački et al., 2021). The range of different interpretations of isolation or revitalization is constructed as an exclusively individual choice or a transitional phenomenon where there is no capacity for change, with a lack of focus on the responsibility of political elites in the transition period from socialism to capitalism (Kallis, 2011; Castells, 2017). Therefore, to better understand what it means to be isolated, it is crucial to locate and compare the different experiences of individual isolation and develop a new anthropological approach to analysis.

Theory of isolation in practice

It is this approach, i.e., the presentation of diverse experiences of isolation, that is the focus of this issue of *Traditiones*, in which the Croatian and Slovenian authors interweave their experiences from different situations and places where they went for field research. The article by Špela Ledinek Lozej (2024), which opens the collection of scientific articles, presents experiences of isolation, solitude, and loneliness in the Alps. Based on the life story and experiences of the woman at the center of the research, it reveals the connectedness of people in geographically isolated mountains. It challenges assumptions about isolation and loneliness and offers a fresh understanding of remoteness. The author emphasizes that perceptions of isolation are usually contextual and relational, and not simply a consequence of remoteness. The same is true for perceptions of loneliness, which are not necessarily related to the number of connections, but to the quality of relationships and the dynamics of social inclusion and exclusion in the local community. The article thus indirectly draws attention to a theme that is relevant in the contemporary world, namely the feeling of loneliness in crowded cities that are interconnected by digital links. Despite their remoteness, those who are alone can also be content in their solitude because of the quality of the relationships they establish and maintain.

In the following article, Nikolina Hazdovac Bajić (2024) discusses the way of life of seafarers in their “floating homes.” In her analysis, she presents the multilayered practices of home construction, which are expressed through the use and production of artefacts, the preservation of traditions and rituals, the creation of memories, and the representation of homeland. The author also points out that isolation on board of a ship has multiple dimensions, as seafarers are not only isolated from the wider society and distanced from their communities and families; they are also isolated from each other, which is why they seek connection and companionship in many things, even in the little man a seafarer scratched out on the galley floor to keep him company. So he was, at least ostensibly, back in the company of society, even if he was hanging out with a non-existent “friend.”

Peter Simonič (2024) also remains in the marine environment, analyzing the remnants of the different economic and political systems on the Croatian island of Žirje and describing the changes in the local community from the 16th century to the present day. He concludes his research with a surprising claim that breaks the established and stereotyped notion of isolated islands and their authentic cultures. As Simonič explains, island life and identity are in fact the result of socio-historical processes and constant “negotiations” with the world, but they are by no means an authentic and self-reinventing social capsule trapped in the middle of the sea. The concept of insularity must therefore be re-evaluated and placed in a local and global context, because only then can it be fully understood.

Ana Perinić Lewis (2024) continues Simonič’s starting point on insularity and presents an ethnographic study of the unbuilt water infrastructure on two Croatian islands. She compares Žirje and the eastern part of the island of Hvar in an attempt to shed light on the changing experiences of development in isolated communities. As she explains, the two islands are examples of different forms of isolation, marginalization, and confinement that have persisted throughout history, and are now perpetuated or even reinforced by non-existent or neglected water supply infrastructure. The lack of water as a basic infrastructure, a resource and a fundamental human right, which in Slovenia – unlike Croatia – is even enshrined in the country’s constitution, leaves people at the mercy of various forms of local and state assistance, often making them feel like second-class citizens. As a result of unfulfilled promises and unrealized development plans and strategies, they become paradigmatic examples of “isolates” who become extremely isolated in an otherwise isolated situation. Their isolation is therefore exponential.

The set of scientific articles is concluded by Katarina Polajnar Horvat (2024), who presents the multifaceted nature of isolation in the westernmost Slovenian village of Robidišče. Her analysis perhaps most concretely highlights the ambiguity of the concept under discussion, which can be expressed in the form of both positive solitude and negative loneliness, as it presents both the opportunities and the problems that isolation

brings. The key problems highlighted by the author include economic opportunities, inadequate infrastructure, and cultural diversity. At the same time, isolation also brings important benefits such as peace, close connection to nature, and the development of strong interpersonal relationships that strengthen communities. It is these positive aspects, which many people miss in urban environments, that are the basis for sustainable development and the revitalization of remote and isolated villages.

Conclusion

After reading the articles published in this issue of *Traditiones*, we believe that the initial exclamation of “you can’t believe it” we would hear when arriving in isolated places, lonely villages, deserted areas, and remote islands will sound a little different. Perhaps it will now sound more like the cry that rang out in the former Yugoslavia as it constantly prepared for every possible crisis, from natural disasters to air raids from East and West: “Nothing should surprise us.” That is the essence of isolation: each of its manifestations is unique, but it is certainly a concept that cannot be given only a positive or a negative connotation. In some contexts, isolation negatively affects demographic and spatial changes, becoming ever more profound and visible in social and cultural practices in the current global environment and health crises. On the other hand, people that have experienced information overload in the time of digitalization and hyper-consumption have started to search for a meaningful life in isolated spaces more than ever to identify new values and find better prospects for themselves.

To understand and learn about isolation, it is necessary to “be there,” with other people (about the ethnographer’s dilemma of “to be, or not to be there” see Podjed, Muršič, 2021). The ambivalence of isolation cannot be known, understood in all its complexity, only from a distance and through a screen. And this is precisely what Maruška Svašek (2024), whose poem we publish at the end of this issue, has perfectly articulated. In it she writes as follows: “I want you here but / all I can / is draw some lines and scratch the waves / so blue, so whole, one moment.” And these fleeting moments, which can scatter like waves when they crash on the shore, can be captured above all – and sometimes only – by ethnography. We can conclude the thought by the quote from *Blade Runner* movie, which came out in 1982, in which Roy Batty, a replicant or artificial human, one of the last of his kind, said in one of the concluding scenes: “All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain...” Indeed, all those moments will be lost without us being there, experiencing firsthand the power of isolation.

Acknowledgements

This article is a result of the research project Isolated People and Communities in Slovenia and Croatia. Dan Podjed acknowledges the support of the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (J6–4610, P6–0088). Lana Peternel acknowledges the support of the Croatian Science Foundation (ISOLATION, IPS-2022-02-3741).

References

- Argenti, Nicolas. 2019. *Remembering Absence: The Sense of Life in Island Greece*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvfc54vt>.
- Askham, Janet, Dieter Ferring, and Giovanni Lamura. 2007. Personal Relationships in Later Life. In *Ageing in Society*, eds. John Bond, Sheila M. Peace, Freya Dittmann-Kohli, and Gerben Westerhoff, 186–206. London: Sage. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446278918.n9>.
- Baldacchino, Godfrey. 2006. Islands, Island Studies, *Island Studies Journal* 1: 1. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24043/isj.185>.
- Baldacchino, Godfrey. 2008. Studying Islands: On Whose Terms? Some Epistemological and Methodological Challenges to the Pursuit of Island Studies. *Island Studies Journal* 3: 1. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24043/001c.81189>.
- Bille, Mikkel, Frida Hastrup, and Tim Flohr Sørensen, eds. 2010. *An Anthropology of Absence: Materializations of Transcendence and Loss*. New York: Springer. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-5529-6>.
- Burawoy, Michael and Katherine Verdery. 1999. *Uncertain Transition: Ethnographies of Change in the Postsocialist World*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Carsten, Janet. 2007. *Ghosts of Memory: Essays on Remembrance and Relatedness*. Malden, Oxford, Carlton: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Caruth, Cathy. 1996. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore, London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Castells, Manuel. 2017. *Another Economy Is Possible: Culture and Economy in a Time of Crisis*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Collins. 2024. Permacrisis. *Collins Dictionary*. URL: <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/permacrisis>.
- Dawdy, Shannon Lee. 2010. Clockpunk Anthropology and the Ruins of Modernity. *Current Anthropology* 51 (6): 761–793. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1086/657626>.
- Drazin, Adam. 2018. The Fitness of Persons in the Landscape: Isolation, Belonging and Emergent Subjects in Rural Ireland. *Social Anthropology / Anthropologie Sociale* 26 (4): 535–549. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1469-8676.12521>.
- Driessen, Miriam. 2018. Rural Voids. *Public Culture* 30 (1): 61–84. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-4189167>.
- Dugački, Vlatka, Filip Škiljan, and Lana Peternel. 2021. *Nestala naselja u Republici Hrvatskoj: povijesno-demografsko-antropološke perspektive*. Zagreb: Plejada.
- Dzenovska, Dace. 2011. Notes on Emptiness and the Importance of Maintaining Life. *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 29 (2): 228–241.

- Dzenovska, Dace. 2018. Emptiness and Its Futures: Staying and Leaving as Tactics of Life in Latvia. *Focaal: Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology* 80 (1): 16–29. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3167/fcl.2018.800102>.
- Dzenovska, Dace. 2020. The Timespace of Emptiness. In *Orientations to the Future*, eds. Rebecca Bryant and Daniel M. Knight. *American Ethnologist* (Online). URL: <https://americanethnologist.org/online-content/collections/orientations-to-the-future/the-timespace-of-emptiness> (accessed 22.11.2024).
- Dzenovska, Dace and Nicholas De Genova. 2018. Desire for the Political in the Aftermath of the Cold War. *Focaal: Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology* 80 (1): 1–15.
- Eriksen, Thomas Hylland. 2001. *Small Places, Large Issues: An Introduction to Social and Cultural Anthropology*. Pluto Press.
- Geertz, Clifford. 1983. *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gössling, Steffan and G. Wall. 2007. Island Tourism. In *A World of Islands: An Island Studies Reader*, ed. Godfrey Baldacchino, 429–448. Charlottetown, Luqa: Institute of Island Studies, Agenda Academic.
- Gupta, Akhil. 2018. The Future in Ruins: Thoughts on the Temporality of Infrastructure. In *The Promise of Infrastructure*, eds. Nikhil Anand, Akhil Gupta, and Hannah Appel, 62–79. New York: Duke University Press.
- Hazdovac Bajić, Nikolina. 2024. Floating Homes: Homemaking Practices among Seafarers as Strategies against Isolation. *Traditiones* 53 (2): 37–62. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3986/Traditio2024530203>.
- Henig, David and Daniel M. Knight. 2023. Polycrisis: Prompts for an Emerging World. *Anthropology Today* 39 (2): 3–6. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8322.12793>.
- Horst, Heather A. and Daniel Miller. 2006. *The Cell Phone: An Anthropology of Communication*. New York: Berg.
- Howes, David. 1991. *The Varieties of Sensory Experience: A Sourcebook in the Anthropology of the Senses*. Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press.
- Kallis, Giorgos. 2011. In Defence of Degrowth. *Ecological Economics* 70 (5): 873–880. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2010.12.007>.
- Klepec, Peter. 2024. Kriza, katakriza, krizolacija [Crisis, Catacrisis, Crisolation]. In *Krizolacija: Znanstveno branje o izoliranih ljudeh* [Crisolation: Scientific Reading About Isolated People], ed. Dan Podjed, 173–192. Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, ZRC SAZU.
- Kociatkiewicz, Jerzy and Monika Kostera. 1999. The Anthropology of Empty Spaces. *Qualitative Sociology* 22 (1): 37–50. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1022131215755>.
- Kottak, Conrad. 2017. *Window on Humanity: A Concise Introduction to General Anthropology*. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Kozorog, Miha. 2013. Poskusno o Benečiji s konceptom odročnosti: migracije in konstrukcija kraja. *Ars & humanitas* 7 (2): 136–149. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4312/ars.7.2.136-149>.
- Leavey, Gerard, Kate Loewenthal, and Michael King. 2007. Challenges to Sanctuary: The Clergy as a Resource for Mental Health Care in the Community. *Social Science & Medicine* 65 (3): 548–559. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2007.03.050>.
- Ledinek Lozej, Špela. 2024. Isolation and Connectedness in the Bohinj Alps: Experiences of a *majerca*. *Traditiones* 53 (2): 19–36. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3986/Traditio2024530202>.



- Ma, Guoqing. 2020. Islands and the World from an Anthropological Perspective. *International Journal of Anthropology and Ethnology* 4 (12): 1–17. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41257-020-00038-x>.
- Manners, Robert A. 1965. Remittances and the Unit of Analysis in Anthropological Research. *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 21 (3): 179–195.
- Munn, Nancy D. 1996. Excluded Spaces: The Figure in the Australian Aboriginal Landscape. *Critical Inquiry* 22 (3): 446–465.
- Navaro-Yashin, Yael. 2009. Affective Spaces, Melancholic Objects: Ruination and the Production of Anthropological Knowledge. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15: 1–18. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9655.2008.01527.x>.
- OED. 2024. Isolation. *Online Etymology Dictionary*. <https://www.etymonline.com/word/isolation>.
- Perinić Lewis, Ana. 2024. Connected by Sea, Isolated by Water: Water and Water Supply Infrastructure on Two Croatian Islands. *Traditiones* 53 (2): 93–119. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3986/Traditio2024530205>.
- Peternel, Lana and Dan Podjed. 2024. Container Life in Post-earthquake Croatia. *Focaal: Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology* 101. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3167/fcl.2024.100702>.
- Petrović, Nikola, Lana Peternel, and Branko Ančić. 2020. The Rejectionist Ethic and the Spirit of the Green Economy: The Western Zeitgeist, the Croatian Context, and Green Entrepreneurship. *Traditiones* 49 (1): 13–36. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3986/Traditio2020490101>.
- Phillipson, Chris, Miriam Bernard, Judith Phillips, and Jim Ogg. 2001. *The Family and Community Life of Older People*. London: Routledge.
- Podjed, Dan. 2020. *Antropologija med štirimi stenami: Spoznavanje družbe in sebe med pandemijo* [Anthropology Between Four Walls: Getting to Know Society and Ourselves During a Pandemic]. Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, ZRC SAZU.
- Podjed, Dan. 2023. Spomini na medčasje: Vzratni pogled na izolacijo v času krize [Memories of the Meantime: A Rear View on the Times of Crisis]. *Etnolog* 33: 83–101.
- Podjed, Dan and Rajko Muršič. 2021. To Be or Not to Be There: Remote Ethnography During the Crisis and Beyond. *Etnolog* 31: 35–51.
- Polajnar Horvat, Katarina. 2024. Revitalizing Robidišče: Navigating the Challenges and Opportunities of Marginalized Rural Communities. *Traditiones* 53 (2): 121–143. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3986/Traditio2024530206>.
- Royle, Stephen A. 2007. Island Spaces and Identities: Definitions and Typologies. In *A World of Islands: An Island Studies Reader*, ed. Godfrey Baldacchino, 33–56. Charlottetown, Luqa: Institute of Island Studies, Agenda Academic.
- Sassen, Saskia. 2005. The Global City: Introducing a Concept. *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* 11 (2): 27–43.
- Simonič, Peter. 2017. Insularity and the Political Economy of Tourism: An Anthropological Analysis of Zlarin Island and the Trenta Valley. *Etnološka tribina* 40 (47): 161–179. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15378/1848-9540.2017.40.06>.
- Simonič, Peter. 2024. The Island of Žirje: Challenging Claims of Isolation. *Traditiones* 53 (2): 63–91. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3986/Traditio2024530204>.
- Svašek, Maruška. 2024. Lockdown Friend. *Traditiones* 53 (2): 144–146. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3986/Traditio2024530207>.
- Thrift, Nigel. 2000. Afterwords. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 18 (2): 213–255. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1068/d214t>.

- Tilki, Mary, Louise Ryan, Alessio D'Angelo, and Rosemary Sales. 2009. *The Forgotten Irish*. London: Social Policy Research Centre.
- Woolfson, Charles. 2010. 'Hard Times' in Lithuania: Crisis and 'Discourses of Discontent' in Postcommunist Society. *Ethnography* 11 (4): 487–514. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1466138110372586>.

Moč izolacije

Antropološke raziskave o izolaciji, predstavljene v članku in tudi v tem zvezku *Traditiones*, opozarjajo, da je za razumevanje izoliranih ljudi in skupnosti še vedno izjemno pomemben etnografski pristop, s katerim spoznamo vsakdanje prakse, vrednote in pojmovanje časa, kraja in identitete, hkrati pa analiziramo lastne predsodke in izkušnje drugih ljudi. Na podlagi raziskav o različnih oblikah in procesih izolacije avtorja prispevka razpravljata, zakaj je izolacija pomemben družbeni izziv. Kakor ugotavljata, ima lahko tako negativne kot tudi pozitivne posledice za fizične, čustvene in duhovne razsežnosti vsakdanjika ter vpliva na posameznike in skupnosti, in to tako v odročnih krajih kot tudi v urbanih središčih.

Pomembno je še, da se vrste izolacije bistveno razlikujejo tako na intimni in medosebni ravni kot tudi na ravni skupnosti. In prav to je po mnenju avtorjev smisel preučevanja izolacije: vsaka od njenih manifestacij je enkratna, hkrati pa njenim pojavnim oblikam pogosto ni mogoče pripisati zgolj pozitivne ali negativne konotacije. V nekaterih kontekstih nedvomno negativno vpliva na demografske in prostorske spremembe, ki v globalnem okolju in trajnih ter prepletenih krizah postajajo globlje in očitnejše v družbenih in kulturnih praksah. Po drugi strani pa se ljudje v času digitalizacije in hiperporabništva vse pogosteje počutijo preobremenjeni in začenjajo bolj kot v preteklosti iskati zatočišče na izoliranih lokacijah, da bi tam v miru poiskali nove vrednote ter sebi in bližnjim zagotovili boljše in predvsem bolj umirjeno življenje.

Isolation and Connectedness in the Bohinj Alps: Experiences of a *Majerca*

Špela Ledinek Lozej

ZRC SAZU, Institute of Slovenian Ethnology, Slovenia

spela.ledinek@zrc-sazu.si

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0632-1414>

This article explores the experiences of isolation, solitude, and loneliness in the Bohinj mountain pastures or alps. Based on the life story and experiences of a long-term shepherdess (Sln. *majerca*), it reveals the connectedness of people in geographically isolated alps. The analysis, drawing on long-term ethnographic research, challenges the presupposed assumptions of loneliness and solitude, proposing a relational understanding of remoteness.

• **Keywords:** isolation, loneliness, solitude, alps, Bohinj region

V članku so podane izkušnje izolacije, samote in osamljenosti v bohinjskih planinah (Julijske Alpe, Slovenija). Na podlagi življenjske zgodbe in izkušenj dolgoletne majerce se razkriva povezanost ljudi v geografsko izoliranih planinah. Ugotovitve spodbijajo domneve o osamljenosti in samoti ter ponujajo relacijsko razumevanje odročnosti. Članek temelji na dolgoletni etnografiji, ki je vključevala opazovanje z udeležbo, pogovore in intervjuje.

• **Ključne besede:** izolacija, osamljenost, samota, planine, Bohinj

Cilka¹ shares with me her uncertainty about returning to the lower mountain pasture. She has eye problems. Or maybe she will go, but probably without cattle. “*They need to start caring for the cattle themselves,*” she says. Last summer, when I visited her and her sister in the lower alp² at

¹ After a joint review of the Slovenian version of the manuscript, Cilka Mlakar decided that anonymization was not necessary, and so her personal name as well as the geographical names of locations are used in the text.

² For pieces of land in the mountains consisting of (individual or collective) pastures, hut(s), stall(s), and sometimes even a dairy, which were occupied by animals, herders, and ultimately a dairyman in the summer months (and the lower ones also during spring and autumn), Slovenian uses the term *planina*. A considerable variety of terms are used in other Alpine languages and dialects, with Roderick Peattie (1936: 129) citing more than fifty expressions, but there is no fixed and standard equivalent in English. Some authors use the English expression *mountain pasture* or *Alpine pasture* or, sometimes, also (*vertical*) *transhumance* to refer to the activity. In his interdisciplinary and international bibliography *Alpine Pasture Farming in the Alps* (2021), Werner Bätzing used the phrase *alpine pasture farming* for the activity; however, his interest was broader. To remain concentrated on the piece of land I decided to use the expression *alp*, which is less usual in this context. The American geographer Roderick Peattie defined an alp in this sense (i.e., as a unit of a farm in the mountains) as early as 1936 in the chapter ‘What Is an Alp?’ in his *Mountain Geography*: “Alps are, in the language of those who live amongst them, the grassy slopes above the tree line, the grassy areas in hanging valleys, the pastures on the mountain spurs, and the steppe vegetation of plateaus and about the peaks. The alp is, therefore, not a peak but a mountain pasture. [...] The term alp is perhaps the most universally used. Some American physiographers have selected the term *alb* for use. The writer sees little reason to use other than the widely accepted *alm* or *alp*” (1936: 125, 129). Following the example of some other anthropologists (e.g., Netting, 1981; Viazzo, 1989), I decided to translate the Slovenian word *planina* as *alp*. Hence, in this article the expression *alp*, lowercase, is used in this sense—that is, as a mountain pasture composed of buildings, people, animals, and activities; when capitalized (e.g., the Julian Alps), it refers to a mountain range. The etymological explanations of the name *Alps*, Europe’s highest mountain range, vary; according to one etymology, the entire range was named after the alps in the sense of these pastures.

Zajamniki, they were summering for the first time without dairy cows, tending only suckler cows, non-milking cows, and calves. She seems to be afraid; afraid of losing her strength, of no longer being able “*to pick up the slack around the house,*”³ as she so vividly put it on various occasions; and probably also afraid of not having those summer months of solitude, when she is responsible only for herself and for the livestock. It seems that she is less alone in the alps than during the rest of the year, when she lives with her sister-in-law and nephews or with her siblings.⁴ (Field notes, March 15th, 2024)

Introduction

This article deals with the concepts of isolation, solitude, and loneliness from the perspective of a *majerca* (plural: *majerce*). This is a local term for a woman that resides in an alp during the summer months and takes care of the animals.⁵ It discusses isolated people and communities in Slovenia within the pre- and post-pandemic context of the experiences, perceptions, and understandings of a *majerca* from the Bohinj region in Slovenia’s Julian Alps, who spent her summers in isolated and remote mountain pastures. Until the mid-twentieth century—and in fragments and modifications sometimes even up to the present—the Bohinj region, like other parts of the Julian Alps and the Alps in general, largely depended on alpine pasture husbandry.⁶ It was based on the cyclic migration of people and their livestock between permanent winter settlements in the valley and temporary summer settlements in the alpine and subalpine zones. Two or more spatially separated sites of agricultural production developed: arable farming and haymaking in the valleys, and mountain pasturing in the highlands—that is, in (high or low) alps (Sln. *planine*) with shelters for animals, people, and milk processing.⁷

³ What is meant by *house* (Sln. *hiša*) in this context is not only a house as a physical structure, but especially a household and/or a homestead.

⁴ Translations of the interviews were made by the author with the aid of AI tools (DeepL Translate and InstaText) and then copyedited.

⁵ The term *majerca* for a woman and *majer* (pl. *majerji*) for a man in the sense of ‘keeper of cattle in an alp’ originates from German *Maier*, which comes from Latin *maior domus* ‘steward of a manor house’. The term was used in German and the local Bohinj dialect in the sense of a ‘steward or keeper of a mountain pasture’ (Cevc, 1992b). For detailed explanations of the roles and responsibilities of a *majerca* (and a *majer*), who takes care of the cattle of one or more breeders and helps the cheesemaker in turns, and of the shepherds and cheesemakers in the Bohinj alps, see Novak (2024: 140–174). There are differences between the exact scope of activities of a *majer(ca)* in other local dialects; for the Solčava region, see, for example Vršnik (2022). Today, the roles of a *majer(ca)*, shepherd, and cheesemaker often overlap due to the decline in and transformation of alpine farming, as is also evident from Cilka’s biography.

⁶ It is also known as the alpine agro-pastoral system or alpine pasture farming (Bätzing, 2021: 124).

⁷ Such agricultural production had many advantages, the most evident being able to supply up to one-third of the farm’s fodder (Kirchengast, 2008), thus making the best possible use of different elevations

There were fifty-four alps in the Bohinj region in the first half of the twentieth century (Novak, 2024: 44), and they formed a vital part of animal husbandry and everyday life. The importance of alps did not change immediately after the postwar⁸ nationalization of land, but only after a general decline in agriculture in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and especially after organized collective dairying stopped being practiced due to the concentration of cooperative dairying in the industrial plant in the valley,⁹ and probably also due to a lack of sufficient labor force.¹⁰ After that, some alps were abandoned and others began transforming into communities of vacation cottages, with vacationers gradually outnumbering those that earned their living in an alp.¹¹ The transformation of entire alps into these vacation communities depended on their accessibility by car. It was not until the 1970s, when forest roads were built for forestry purposes, that the lower alps were connected to the valley by roads. In contrast, the high alps remained accessible only by unpaved tracks or on foot¹² until the 1990s and were characterized by their geographical isolation.

What does it mean to summer in a remote and isolated place, inaccessible to traffic, from spring to fall? To depend on yourself and be on your own for more than three months? With poor connections to the rest of the world? And at the same time being responsible for forty head of cattle and the seasonal cheese production for the entire village? And then, as in Cilka's case, having only underaged children to help drive and herd cattle to the daily pastures and to process milk, the eldest being just fourteen years old? How did Cilka experience these cyclical seclusions and isolation, and how did she cope with loneliness and solitude?

Various studies indicate that the personal perception of solitude and loneliness varies greatly depending on their cultural meaning and an individual's background and socialization. Solitude is often a positive, self-sufficient experience, which offers benefits such as freedom, creativity, intimacy, and spirituality (Long, Averill, 2003), whereas loneliness is usually seen as a negative state, a feeling of physical and/or social isolation,

with their various growing seasons (Bätzing, 2021; Ledinek Lozej, 2022). In the Bohinj region, cattle were usually driven to the lower mountains at the end of May or in June – and to the high mountains in June, by Midsummer Eve (June 24th) at the latest. Unlike the lower mountains, the high mountains had no meadows and no private land, only collective pastures. In the autumn the cattle returned to the lower mountains in stages (Novak, 2024).

⁸ Referring to the Second World War.

⁹ The industrial dairy in Srednja Vas started processing milk from the entire Bohinj region in 1971. That was also the last year of organized collective dairying in the Bohinj alps (Novak, 2024: 189).

¹⁰ Due to industrialization, people preferred to look for paid work in nearby factories. In addition, industrialization and the decline in agriculture coincided with other social changes, such as fewer extended families and children, from among whom *majerce* and *majerji* could be recruited.

¹¹ The decrease in agricultural activity was the result of the political and economic policy in force under the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Čepič, 2005). For the Bohinj alps, see the data gathered by Dušan Jovič (2016).

¹² In these cases, all transport to and from the alps was on foot, with cheese and hay being transported on sleds (Novak, 2024: 73–90).

with potentially (negative) psychological and physiological effects. The former is often viewed as a state of being alone without being lonely, as a voluntary condition in which an individual seeks to spend time alone, as beneficial, and a way of achieving personal growth, self-reflection, or spiritual deepening: it is an opportunity for introspection, imagination, and contemplation with yourself. In contrast, loneliness is characterized by a feeling of isolation, nostalgia, sadness, and even depression resulting from being alone; it is an involuntary and negative state in which a person longs for human contact but is unable to find it. “If disconnection from others is solitude, loneliness is a disconnection within a desire for connection” (HadžiMuhamedović, 2021 [2018]: 104).

The same temporal, spatial, and cultural context can be perceived as loneliness or solitude in terms of feelings and emotional implications. However, as pointed out by Safet HadžiMuhamedović in his poetic book *Waiting for Elijah* (2021 [2018]: 104),

if there were to be an anthropology of solitude and loneliness, it would have to be an anthropology of communication. We would have to dive into the worlds of connections, longed for or rejected. We would have to look into what people are struggling to regain or discard. We would have to trace the spatial and the temporal qualities of solitude and loneliness and the techniques of coping with them. Even when to be alone is a matter of choice, it is one predicated on the condition of relationships. Of course, the lines between voluntary and involuntary solitude, much like those of displacement, are blurry.

The different hermeneutics—the one used in my research proposal¹³ and the one evident from Cilka’s perceptions and understandings of loneliness—became immediately apparent. When I started to interview her about her experiences of isolation and loneliness, and asked her how she felt about being alone, she explained how it had happened in her life that she had remained alone (i.e., single): “*I wasn’t at home, and time passes before you find a good partner. It was the kind of work and the kind of company I had, I wouldn’t have had a partner there. But then time passes, and when you’re that old, you see how good it is to be alone, on your own.*”¹⁴

Cilka understood the question about how she felt about being *alone* (Sln. *sama*) as how she felt about being *single* (Sln. *samska*). This initial misunderstanding expanded the original focus on isolation, solitude, and loneliness in mountain pastures and cyclical temporalities to a diachronic perspective, also embracing her experiences of being alone,

¹³ In the research proposal for the project *Isolated People and Communities in Slovenia and Croatia*, loneliness was defined as the result of geographical isolation, remoteness, or the COVID-19 pandemic (see Podjed 2023, 2024).

¹⁴ Various interviews were carried out with Cilka Mlakar. All the interviews were conducted by the author, except for one in 2018 that was conducted together with Saša Roškar.

her feelings of loneliness and solitude at various stages of life, and her perceptions of isolation and remoteness in various contexts and social situations. “Ethnographers begin with a set of questions, revise them throughout the course of inquiry, and at the end emerge with different questions than they started with” (Rosaldo, 1989: 7).

This research is based on numerous conversations with Cilka and long-term ethnographic observations in the high alp at Krstenica and the lower alp at Zajamniki, where she has been summering since 1969: participant observation during the entire 1998 summer season in the Krstenica alp and further targeted or sporadic revisits to both alps.¹⁵ The long-term observation and biographical method (Ramšak, 2000; Rogelja, 2014) were combined with the findings from the other alps as well as from the considerable amount of literature on Bohinj mountain pastures.¹⁶ These diachronic and synchronic extensions made it possible to outline a sense of loneliness, solitude, isolation, and connectivity, or draw a situational¹⁷ “anthropological silhouette” (Zeitlyn, 2008) composed of Cilka’s life story and sporadic zooming out. The detail is used to paint the general picture; the small scales—the intimate, the local, the vernacular, and the idiosyncratic—are given as a substance on which synthesis and abstractions might be built. Or not, because we, ethnographically informed researchers and writers, “are not only critical observers of collective meanings; we are participants in their creation and perpetuation” (HadžiMuhamedović, 2021 [2018]: 38).

Over fifty summers in the alps

Cilka was born in 1935 and has spent more than fifty summers looking after cattle in the Krstenica and Zajamniki alps in the heart of the Julian Alps. From the end of June (the Saturday around June 29th, or the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul) to the beginning of September (the Sunday after September 8th, or the Nativity of Mary), she tended the animals of various owners on the communal high alp of Krstenica. Before (from mid-May to the end of June) and after the peak summer season in the Krstenica alp,

¹⁵ I revisited the alps in 1999, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2018, 2019, 2021, 2023, and 2024. The last two visits, conducted as part of the project *Isolated People and Communities in Slovenia and Croatia*, included observations and a narrative interview focused on Cilka’s experiences of loneliness and solitude. All materials are held by the author and some are accessible in the Audiovisual Laboratory Archive and the documentation of the Institute of Slovenian Ethnology at ZRC SAZU.

¹⁶ There is a considerable amount of ethnological literature on the former alpine pasture economy in the Bohinj region (e.g., Novak, 1955, 1969, 1987, 1989, 2024; Cevc, 1984, 1992a, 1992b), as well as on current issues, strategies, and perspectives (Ledinek Lozej, 2002, 2013; Repič, 2014; Ledinek Lozej, Roškar, 2018a, 2018b), its heritagization (Habinc, 2013), and tourism (Bajuk Senčar, 2005). However, alpine pastures and alps have not yet been considered from the perspective of isolation and remoteness, such as, for example, the Trenta Valley (Simonič, 2017) and the Natisone Valley (Kozorog, 2013, 2014) have been.

¹⁷ “The source of light, the positions of observer and the observed, and the reflecting surfaces all change the way a silhouette is perceived” (HadžiMuhamedović, 2021 [2018]: x).

Cilka herded cattle in the lower alp at Zajamniki. In contrast to the high alp, she took care of fewer cattle there or, over the past two decades, exclusively “her own cattle.”¹⁸

How did it happen that Cilka spent so many summers in the alps? And how did she come to take this work in the late 1960s, after she had already moved from the village of Bohinjska Češnjica to Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia? How did it happen that among all the opportunities that came her way, from working in a factory to a hospital, she chose to spend summers tending the cattle and combine this with other jobs and occupations for the rest of the year? For example, she has performed various forms of care work, such as looking after children, caring for the elderly, doing housework for her brothers, or working on the family farm. Her answer to these inquiries is simple and straightforward: “*Don’t know, that’s just how it happened.*”

Cilka was already involved in livestock farming and other agricultural activities as a child because it was common for children to help with the various farm chores from an early age.¹⁹ From 1946 onward, she was in the Krstenica alp helping her older sister: “*As a child of eleven, thirteen, I spent a lot of time here with my sister. And I learned everything ... It was normal that you went [to help and work], you accepted the work and did it, it didn’t even occur to you not to do it, you had to be there.*”

During the first decades after the Second World War, despite the political changes and the nationalization of land, the management of the alps remained more or less the same as under previous regimes: livestock owners had to provide the herdsmen, usually a member of the extended family or hired workers, who took care of the livestock and alternately helped the professional cheesemaker provided by the cooperative (Ledinek Lozej, 2002; Novak, 2024). Cilka has fond memories of this part of her life because, as she says, she “was simply there” with her sister and was well received by the other *majerce*. This was not always the case. Some of them also had bad memories of their childhood in the alps, either because they were homesick and missed their families and peers, or because they were teased and tricked into doing more work by older *majerce*. As Anka Novak (2024: 150) documented, not all of them were able to cope with the hard work and life in the alps.

In her early twenties, Cilka found work elsewhere, first as a housewife in Bled, and then she had various jobs in Ljubljana. She said: “*I just had to get away from home.*” Her favorite job was as a nurse. She still regrets that she could not stay at the hospital because her mother fell ill and she had to return home. Her older sister married, and the other sisters had other jobs and commitments or were in school, and so she, as the

¹⁸ “Her” meaning the cattle of her family farm and close relatives. For more on the rotation of people and livestock between the valley and the low and high mountain pastures in the Bohinj region, see Novak (2024).

¹⁹ Children played an important role not only in the Bohinj region, but also in other Alpine regions until the 1960s and, in some places, even up to the 1970s. In the Bohinj region, some children became independent shepherds as early as age twelve or fourteen (Novak, 1989, 2024). For more on child labor, see Turk Niskač (2021).

youngest, was forced to return home at the peak of farming activities. “*It was just taken for granted; you just had to do it.*” Instead of taking on the housework at the farm, she went to the alp, where she replaced her sister. After a few years of taking turns with her sister, it was just taken for granted both by her and the rest of the family that she would take over the work in the alp during summer. To be able to spend the whole summer in the alp, she also changed her job and worked as a nanny and housewife for the rest of the year. This made it easier for her to combine summer work in the alp with a more flexible winter job; eventually she could even take the children she looked after with her to the alp. Because she had to look after small children, the place had to be accessible by car. As a result, she spent her first five seasons in the lower alp at Zajamniki, which—unlike the Krstenica alp, which remained inaccessible to motorized vehicles until the early 1990s²⁰—could already be accessed by car in the 1970s. She was there with her brother-in-law, who had his own animals. But they actually looked after the animals together and made cheese together: “*We did that together. We each had our own cows; I had ours, he had his and maybe a few others [from other owners]. We each milked our own cows. That hundred-liter cauldron was always full of milk, we did that [made cheese] together, and ate together, too. Actually, we did everything together.*”²¹

The Zajamniki alp was not only easily accessible by car for cattle owners and herders but also for tourists and vacation cottage owners, who were slowly transforming the seasonal agricultural settlement into a vacation community. The overcrowding of visitors and vacationers starting in the late 1970s and, at the same time, the fear of losing the collective cheese dairy in the Krstenica alp,²² prompted the return to the high alp for the peak summer season. First, it was her brother-in-law that returned, but Cilka soon joined him because he was getting old and could no longer be alone. Initially, they only looked after the cattle owned by their families and some relatives, the same as in the Zajamniki alp. Over time, other local cattle owners, who recognized the value of grazing rights, mountain pastures, and dairying, also began to bring their cattle to the alp and asked Cilka to take them over. The circle of owners interested in getting their cattle to the alp gradually expanded to include other farmers that were once members of the grazing association and held a share of the grazing rights. Those paid her a small fee for grazing their cattle, which was subsidized by the state and the EEC, later EU agricultural policy. In addition, they were required to provide Cilka with

²⁰ In the early 1990s, a makeshift road was built that can be used by off-road vehicles, tractors, motorcycles, and, more recently, quad bikes. At the same time, the alp was connected to phone lines, and since 1998 people have been able to use cell phones there. Previously, the only connection with the rest of the world was on foot; it took at least an hour’s walk to get to the lower mountain pasture, which could be reached by car (Ledinek Lozej, 1999, 2002).

²¹ *Majerce* and *majeri* helped each other with the grazing and milking if necessary, but they always cooked for themselves, each on their own hearth (Novak, 2024). The fact that Cilka and her brother-in-law cooked and ate together indicates that they shared the housekeeping and management of activities in the alp.

²² As it happened in the neighboring Jezero mountain pasture.

a week's food supply. At the end of the season, the owners received dairy products in proportion to the milk yield of their cows or the monetary equivalent. Despite the hard work and great responsibility due to the large number of cattle to be taken care of²³ and the enormous quantity of milk to be processed into cheese, ricotta, and butter, she has always enjoyed going to the alp. As she expressively put it: *"I was on my own there."*

Being on her own in the alp and a cheese maker and a shepherdess in one person was not an easy task. She was able to manage all the chores because her nephews and great-nephews—and later also children from all over the Upper Bohinj Valley and elsewhere—helped her. *"Well, after he [her brother-in-law] passed away, I was left alone. But I couldn't do anything without the assistants, without the children. I must admit that I couldn't have done anything alone."* During the last weeks of the alpine pasture season in September, when the older children were already in school, she remained only with the preschool children. However, as she said, *"it worked out."* Through her engagement with children, she raised many of them: she taught them how to milk, handle the cattle, process the milk, and perform other work in the alp. The children gradually proved to be excellent helpers in milking, driving the cattle, churning curd, making butter, and so on. Occasionally, the children of friends, acquaintances, and others from across the Bohinj region came to help. Sometimes, there were fifteen of them, between two and twenty-two years old. The older ones cared for the younger ones and trained them in various skills and tasks. As they grew up, the younger ones took over the tasks. Over the years, some of them became independent in various areas of work. Cilka explained that having children in the alp was a big responsibility, but at the same time it was easier to work with children than with adults. This is because she knew that the children would obey when necessary: *"The children have their tasks, they help when they have to, and then they have free time. And we get on well together."* At the end of the twentieth century, many alps became the scene of older or unemployed marginalized individuals, but the Krstenica alp was full of young people (Ledinek Lozej, Roškar, 2018a, 2018b).

In addition to the children that helped Cilka, there was always a large inflow of people, especially on the weekends, ranging from the cattle owners that brought the weekly supply of food and checked their cows and heifers, the owners and tenants of the huts that had been converted into vacation cottages, and the parents of the children that helped Cilka to a large number of mountaineers and visitors. Hence, despite the remoteness and supposed geographical isolation, Cilka was never alone in the alp. Due to the high level of responsibility, the volume of work, and the many people coming to the alp, she sometimes even missed the solitude and could hardly wait for the cattle to be taken away at the end of the season. *"There was so much to do!"* So, after the

²³ The number varied, but there were usually around thirty milking cows and around twenty non-milking cows (heifers and calves).

end of the grazing season in the high alp, when the owners took away the cattle, she stayed an extra week each year to tidy everything up, pick lingonberries, and be by herself for a while before going to the lower alp at Zajamniki.

In the lower alp, where she only had “her own” cattle, there were other duties: in the spring, for example, the cattle had to be kept in the communal pasture, away from the private meadows intended for mowing; in the fall, on the other hand, the cows were allowed to graze all around, but when the days become shorter and winter approaches, they head down into the valley, especially in bad weather. She often had to go to the lower meadows, more than an hour’s walk away, or to the neighboring mountain pastures to drive them back. In addition, she still had to process a hundred liters of milk into cheese every day. Cilka usually stayed at Zajamniki until well into the fall, when the cattle ate all the hay cut in the mountain meadows and stored in the haylofts above the stables. After that, the cattle were driven into the stables of the farm in the valley, but Cilka remained in the alp for a few more weeks without the cattle, resting, reading, and enjoying her solitude.

Cilka: After the cows went home, I was here for another month or two ... That means that the cows went home sometime in October. [I was here until] November, December, and once it even snowed already ... the first snowfall lasted so long that a firm crust didn't form so that someone would've been able to come [up from the valley]. I had gas, books, and enough to eat. And the radio. I was never bored. After the fuss, the tensions, the children, and getting everything in order ... I needed a vacation, some peace and quiet, and to be alone! Not alone, because they came [to bring her what she needed], I was lucky to be here. I had wood to burn, I lay around and read ...

Author: So that means you actually enjoyed this solitude?

Cilka: Yes, I did. I needed it. Sometimes, I really extended it a bit too much [laughter] But as long as my mother was still alive, she made sure I had everything, that I wasn't alone, and that they brought me food.

Author: So, you weren't lonely, just alone?

Cilka: Yes, alone. You need it. Mentally you have to detach yourself from it. Then [after returning from the alp to the valley] there was a different life ...

And she went on about her work for the rest of the year. When she stopped working as a nanny and housekeeper for a family with two children because they were already grown up, she either looked after older relatives and friends, kept house for her brother, who was a priest among the Slovenian emigrants in Germany, or helped her sister-in-law run the farm. The last was necessary after her brother’s death, who inherited the family farm. She was always, as she says expressively, “*picking up the slack around the house.*”

In 2016, she retired from managing the Krstenica alp, and since then she has only taken care of her family farm's cattle in the Zajamniki alp. When I visited her that year, she seemed somewhat ambivalent about her retirement. On the one hand, she was happy to be relieved of all the work and responsibility and, above all, that her niece, whom she raised herself, was taking over the management of the alp. On the other hand, after more than forty seasons, she could still have a place in the alp as a, so to speak, honorary *majerca*. When I revisited her and her sister in 2023 at Zajamniki, they were summering there without dairy cattle for the first time in over half a century, herding only suckler cows, non-milking cows, and calves. She said it was fine and about time, and she seemed satisfied with the situation. *"I'm just with our cows and resting, and I don't have to make cheese anymore this year. You know how much work that takes all morning, plus milking!"*

In the spring of 2024, after over fifty grazing seasons spent in the alps, she seemed afraid of the coming summer and told me about her uncertainty about whether she should return to the Zajamniki alp and look after the animals. She said it was time for her family to find another solution for the cattle. However, at the same time it seemed she would also like to spend another summer in the lower alp with her sister.

I visited the Zajamniki alp again during the summer that year. After a long period of seasonal vivacity, laughter, and occasional arguments between the two sisters, evening masses on the radio, and the sounds of cow bells, mooing, and the electric power generator, the Mlakar cottage and stall were lonely. When I visited her at the end of the summer, which Cilka spent with her sister, taking care of and housekeeping for her retired brothers, she said it was best like this: *"I can do this [housekeeping for her siblings] easily!"*



Figure 1: Milking in the Krstenica alp. Photo: Špela Ledinek Lozej, 1998.

“Being on your own” versus “picking up the slack around the house”

Two phrases were repeated several times in our conversations. The first one, *to pick up the slack*, referred to Cilka’s role in the household, when necessary, and the second, *to be on your own*, referred to her longing. Their intensity becomes even clearer considering that Cilka has actually survived into the twenty-first century as a representative of a dying social group of unmarried aunts and uncles that were part of the extended or stem family. They were an important part of the family farm economy until the second half of the twentieth century. “*I was expected to do everything around the house, ... pick up all the slack ... and I just figured it out.*” Cilka is aware of the importance of these single members of society for the farms, households, and families: “*A priest once said: ‘My goodness, how much good single people can do and married people cannot!’ ... Even though I don’t have a family [of my own], I’ve never been bored.*” However, it seems that this was not her initial choice because she wanted “*to be on her own,*” to emancipate herself. So she went to Ljubljana, found a steady job, and gradually bought an apartment. Nevertheless, in her later decisions, she prioritized the needs of the family farm, which was first run by her father, then by her brother and, after his death, by her nephew. Although she managed to build up a wide range of relationships, her family remained the decisive authority in structuring her social life and when it came to making decisions.²⁴ She mentioned several times in our conversation that her family “*would not let her*”—the same family that made her not feel alone by bringing her food and making sure that she had everything after the end of the pasture season. As in other mountain regions, here, too, “winter required a well-organized household and a community to get through your hard times” (HadžiMuhamedović, 2021 [2018]: 86). You were expected to be loyal to the family because outside the family there was emptiness and loneliness. Referring to the various ideologies that structure social life in Alpine communities, as described by John Cole and Eric Wolf in *The Hidden Frontier* (1999 [1974]), Cilka’s disposition is closer to an “exclusive lineage of homesteaders,” which the authors attributed to the German-speaking village of St. Felix in South Tyrol, than to an “open and interlaced network of relations,” attributed to the Italian-speaking village of Trent (Cole, Wolf, 1999 [1974]: 245). The aforementioned “lineage of homesteaders”²⁵ is linked to the assumed predominance of a stem family household structure in Alpine society (see Burns, 1963). This assumption was questioned by Robert Netting (1981) and Pier Paolo Viazzo (1989, 2014). In the book *Balancing on an Alp*, based on the ethnography of the Alpine village of Törbel in Valais (Switzerland), Netting (1981: 220) emphasizes that the “household extension was frequent, but apparently the

²⁴ The importance of family and household was also mentioned for the Trenta community (Simonič, 2017: 170).

²⁵ This lineage also resonates in the work by Robert Minnich (1998), dealing with the homesteaders in the Canale Valley.

result of a duty and necessity, rather than preference” (Netting, 1981: 220). This duty and necessity to support the economic structure of the family farm is evident from Cilka’s decision and expressed in the metaphor of “*picking up the slack around the house.*”

Cilka’s biography reveals that, despite the geographical isolation, she was paradoxically less socially isolated in the alps than in other places and at other times (e.g., in the village, with her brother in Germany, or in the apartment in Ljubljana during winter). This could be a site-specific rejection of the representations of upland communities and highlanders as isolated, marginal, inward-looking, and immobile.²⁶ Her summers in the Krstenica alp with its grassroots management model were indeed quite different from the assumption of isolated and closed collaborative communities. This was instead an open collaborative community composed of several more or less experienced helpers of various age, cattle owners bringing food and other necessities from the valley and carrying back cheese and ricotta, grazing-rights holders, long-term hut renters, all kinds of occasional visitors, tourists, and potential buyers of Cilka’s dairy products, and Cilka at the heart of this complex of relationships. Furthermore, she had an important and responsible role beyond her family farm because she also tended the livestock of farmers from the entire Upper Bohinj Valley. Her availability and dedication proved to be crucial in facilitating the continuity of grazing and milk processing in the communal high alp in the 1980s and 1990s, when there was a major decline in alpine pasture farming in the Bohinj region (Novak, 2024). Due to her availability and zeal, the cattle owners managed to reorganize themselves; first in an unofficial form and, after denationalization, in the form of a restituted agrarian communities. Her inclusion of children as helpers also had a profound influence on the younger generation: by combining childcare with herding, milking, and dairying, she passed on very specific skills and local knowledge. This intergenerational transfer preserved skills and knowledge, and it fostered a strong sense of community and attachment to alpine work and lifestyle. The alp became a vibrant hub for young people, reversing the trend of aging and isolation in rural areas. That was also proved by the fact that, when she retired, the communal high alp was taken over by her great-niece, who was only nineteen at the time. This transition, celebrated by the local and national media, underscored a successful generational passage of traditional knowledge and skills, challenging the narratives of decline often associated with rural youth engagement (Ledinek Lozej, Roškar, 2018a, 2018b).²⁷

Cilka has never felt isolated, lonely, or bored in the alp. On the contrary, she even looked forward to the relief and solitude in late autumn, when the cows were brought down into the valley and she remained alone for a few weeks or even longer: “*I needed*

²⁶ The rejection of these presumptions was clearly elaborated by Pier Paolo Viazzo in his seminal work *Upland Communities* (1989); see also Bojan Baskar’s accompanying text in the Slovenian edition (Baskar, 2014).

²⁷ For more on the generational transfer in the Krstenica alp, see Ledinek Lozej (in press).

a vacation, some peace and quiet, and to be alone!" The family took care of her, bringing her everything she needed, and by reading, solving crosswords, and listening to the radio, she managed to find her way to a solitary existence without feeling lonely.

Loneliness, as already mentioned above, is not simply the absence of contacts, but a discrepancy between one's desired and achieved levels of social relations. It is not about the quantity but the quality of relations and connections. In this regard, Cilka mentioned several times that she was not feeling lonely because she was alone and that, with only the children there to help her out, there were no relational hierarchies:

You know what, because I was my own boss, I didn't feel isolated [in the alp]. There was nobody telling me what to do. If there had been more of us, and let's say, some had been more important and had hung out more with one another, and I had just had to stand there and listen ... because I was the one that was in charge ... That would be different if there had been more of them, and some had been more important. Then you wouldn't have felt like you belonged so much.

Here she pointed to another form of isolation or exclusion from society—the feelings of social marginalization and inferiority in the local community due to various factors, such as the ascribed ideological orientation of the farm, the number of siblings in the household, and personal physiological, social, and psychological dispositions. These feelings of marginalization dissipated in the alp, where she was able to stand “*on her own,*” “*to be the one in charge,*” and to take on an important and responsible role, not only in the alp and the family, but also in the local community as a whole and—due to various tenants, vacationers, and visitors—also beyond. Nevertheless, these feelings of social exclusion also came to the fore when she mentioned that she was never actually thanked by the cattle owners.²⁸ She was referring to an earlier custom when the farmers invited the *majerca* to lunch and a dance at the village inn, and presented them with gifts on St. Martin's Day (Novak, 2024: 159). This was a type of public and social recognition of the responsibilities of the (sometimes left out and socially marginalized) *majerca*. Cilka was also longing for such recognition of her efforts and work, of her care for the cheese, animals, and land. For the social and symbolic recognition within the local community and by the local cattle owners. On the other hand, she received this symbolic recognition from the outside—the municipality and several other institutions (e.g., the regional museum), professionals, and the media; they all praised her role in preserving alpine husbandry. For example, she received a municipal award for her many years of commitment to the alpine pasture. “*The mayor himself brought me*

²⁸ “*We had so many cows, so much livestock ... but I can't remember anyone inviting me anywhere ... Wouldn't it be appropriate, if I had so many cows, to be honored somehow and get a meal?*”

the award because he wanted to get to know me. Because I couldn't attend the event at the end of August, he brought it to me personally here in the alp!"

Cilka's experiences and perceptions of solitude in the alps challenge conventional assumptions about remoteness and isolation. Remoteness is not topographical but topological; its perception is relational to other places; its experience results from interaction with the outside world (Ardener, 2007; Kozorog, 2013). Connectivity with the outside world, which is based on infrastructure,²⁹ such as roads or at least trails accessible by motorized vehicles, landline and cell phone connections,³⁰ and social and economic interdependencies, was decisive for her perception. This dense network of relationships in the alp made it possible to balance between "*picking up the slack around the house*" and "*being on her own.*" She could simultaneously perform productive work for her farm and important paid work for other members of the community, as well as maintaining vital connections beyond her family and the local community. Through "*picking up the slack around the house,*" she has never been lonely; however, she remained *alone*, single. Or was it perhaps the other way around: that she was required to remain *alone* to "*pick up the slack*" as free labor for the farm?

In her late eighties, Cilka still continues to pick up the slack where needed. This summer she was housekeeping for her retired brothers. Because she was not in the



Figure 2: Milking preparations in the Zajamniki alp. Photo: Špela Ledinek Lozej, 2021.

²⁹ Infrastructure is "material forms that allow for the possibility of exchange over space" (Larkin, 2013: 327).

³⁰ The poor infrastructure was decisive only when she was simultaneously working as a professional nanny and *majerca*, and then she opted for the more accessible lower alp instead of higher alp.

alp anymore, her past experiences, roles, social relationships, and connections in the alps and beyond have become a “repository of meaning” (Cohen, 1985) and hence a resource for the present day-to-day meaning-making.

Conclusion

The life story of a long-term *majerca* in the Bohinj alps challenges the conventional notions of isolation, solitude, and loneliness in remote mountain communities. Rather than experiencing the alps as a place of isolation, Cilka’s summers in the high alps were filled with social connection, responsibility, and autonomy. Her life illustrates that remoteness is not simply a matter of geography but that it is shaped by social relationships, infrastructure, and relational ties that connect individuals to their families, communities, and the wider world. Her experiences reveal the ambiguity of solitude in the alps: while physically isolated, she found a profound sense of purpose and connections through her work with the cattle, her engagement with children, and her ongoing interaction with tourists and visitors. For her, solitude was empowering, offering relief from societal pressures and allowing her to manage her responsibilities with independence and authority. At the same time, the dense web of relationships in the alp—whether through family support, work with children, an important role in the community, or occasional visitors—ensured that she was never truly alone.

This article underscores that the perception of remoteness is contextual and relational rather than simply a product of distance. The same applies to the perception of loneliness: it is not necessarily based on the condition of solitude, which was benevolent and welcomed by Cilka; loneliness is not connected with the number of connections but with the quality of relations and with the dynamics of social inclusion and exclusion within the local community. In addition, it also shows the capacity of an individual to reimagine how to be on one’s own in different spaces and times, her resistance to being overwhelmed by family and other dominant structures, and her strategies and tactics of dealing with solitude and loneliness.

Acknowledgements

This article was written as part of the project Isolated People and Communities in Slovenia and Croatia (J6–4610) and the program Heritage on the Margins (P5–0408), which were financed by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency.

References

- Ardener, Edwin. 2007. *The Voice of Prophecy: And Other Essays*. Oxford: Berghahn.
- Bajuk Senčar, Tatiana. 2005. *Kultura turizma: antropološki pogledi na razvoj Bohinja*. Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, ZRC SAZU. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3986/9616568094>.
- Baskar, Bojan. 2014. Alpe antropologov. In *Alpske skupnosti: Okolje, prebivalstvo in družbena struktura*, ed. Pier Paolo Viazzo, 435–457. Ljubljana: Studia humanitatis.
- Bätzing, Werner et al. 2021. *Alm- und Alpwirtschaft im Alpenraum: Eine interdisziplinäre und internationale Bibliographie*. Augsburg, Nürnberg: context.
- Burns, Robert K. 1963. The Circum-Alpine Culture Area: A Preliminary View. *Anthropological Quarterly* 36: 130–155.
- Cevc, Tone. 1984. *Arhitekturno izročilo pastirjev, drvarjev in oglarjev na Slovenskem: kulturnozgodovinski in etnološki oris*. Ljubljana: Državna založba Slovenije.
- Cevc, Tone. 1992a. Bohinjski nadstropni stan v luči strukturne analize. *Traditiones* 21 (1): 7–16.
- Cevc, Tone, 1992b. *Bohinj in njegove planine: srečanja s planšarsko kulturo*. Radovljica: Didakta.
- Cohen, Anthony P. 1985. *The Symbolic Construction of Community*. London: Routledge.
- Čepič, Zdenko. 2005. Kmetijska politika in kmetijstvo. In *Slovenska novejša zgodovina: od programa Zedinjena Slovenija do mednarodnega priznanja Republike Slovenije*, eds. Jasna Fischer et al., 889–893. Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga; Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino.
- Cole, John W. and Eric R. Wolf. 1999 [1974]. *The Hidden Frontier: Ecology and Ethnicity in an Alpine Valley*. Berkeley: University of California.
- HadžiMuhamedović, Safet. 2021 [2018]. *Waiting for Elijah: Time and Encounter in a Bosnian Landscape*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn.
- Habinc, Mateja. 2013. Tradicionalnost prireditve Kravji bal, Vasovanje in Kmečka ohcet v Bohinju s perspektive njihovih organizatorjev. *Traditiones* 42 (2): 85–104. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3986/Traditio2013420205>.
- Jović, Dušan. 2016. Paša in planšarstvo na bohinjskih planinah – pogled v prihodnost. Bachelor's thesis, University of Ljubljana. Ljubljana.
- Kirchengast, Christopher. 2008. *Über Almen zwischen Agrikultur und Trashkultur*. Innsbruck: Innsbruck University Press.
- Kozorog, Miha. 2013. Poskusno o Benečiji s konceptom odročnosti: migracije in konstrukcija kraja. *Ars & Humanitas* 7 (2): 136–149. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4312/ars.7.2.136-149>.
- Kozorog, Miha. 2014. 'The Ritual of Change in a Remote Area: Contemporary Arts and the Renewal of a Post-Cold War Place. *Migrations, The Ritual Year* 8 (8): 43–62.
- Larkin, Brian. 2013. The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42 (1): 327–343. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-092412-155522>.
- Ledinek Lozej, Špela. 1999. *Planina Krstenica*. Bachelor's thesis, University of Ljubljana. Ljubljana.
- Ledinek Lozej, Špela. 2002. Pričevanja o nekdanji ureditvi in življenju v planini Krstenica. *Traditiones* 31 (1): 69–90.
- Ledinek Lozej, Špela. 2013. Paša in predelava mleka v planinah Triglavskega narodnega parka: kulturna dediščina in aktualna vprašanja. *Traditiones* 42 (2): 49–68. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3986/Traditio2013420203>.
- Ledinek Lozej, Špela. 2022. Mountain pasture in Friuli: Past and Present. In *Pastoralism in the Move: Extensive Husbandry and Transhumant Communities at Stake*, ed. Letizia Bindi, 222–240. New York, Oxford: Berghahn.

- Ledinek Lozej, Špela and Saša Roškar. 2018a. Alps of the Julian Alps. In *Održivi razvoj planinskih področja: Iskustva, izazovi i perspektive*, ed. Milojica Jačimović, 121–140. Podgorica: Crnogorska akademija nauka i umjetnosti.
- Ledinek Lozej, Špela and Saša Roškar. 2018b. Planine v Julijskih Alpah pred sodobnimi izzivi: primera planin pod Montažem in v Bohinju. In *Etnologija i selo 21. stoljeća: tradicionalno, ugroženo, kreativno*, eds. Klementina Bratina et. al., 189–209. Zagreb: Hrvatsko etnološko društvo, Slovensko etnološko društvo.
- Ledinek Lozej, Špela. In press. Alpine Pasture in the Julian Alps (Slovenia): The Krstenica Alp Revisited. In *New Horizons for the Alps: Ethnography and emerging more-than-Alpine relations*, eds. Almut Schneider and Elisabeth Tauber. Bolzano: bupress.
- Long, Cristopher and James Averill. 2003. Solitude: An Exploration of Benefits of Being Alone. *Journal for The Theory of Social Behaviour* 33: 21–44. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5914.00204>.
- Melik, Anton. 1950. *Planine v Julijskih Alpah*. Ljubljana: SAZU.
- Minnich, Robert Gary. 1998. *Homesteaders and Citizens: Collective Identity Formation on the Austro-Italian-Slovene Frontier*. Bergen: Norse Publications.
- Netting, Robert M. 1981. *Balancing on an Alp: Ecological Change and Continuity in a Swiss Mountain Community*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Novak, Anka. 1969. O zgodovini planšarstva na Gorenjskem. *Planinski vestnik* 69 (9): 414–418.
- Novak, Anka. 1987. Planinsko sirarstvo. In *Bohinjski zbornik*, ur. Jože Dežman, 73–84. Radovljica: Skupščina občine.
- Novak, Anka. 1989. Življenje in delo planšarjev v bohinjskih gorah. *Glasnik Slovenskega etnološkega društva* 29 (3–4): 121–152.
- Novak, Anka. 2024. *Planšarstvo v Bohinju: »Vse svoje življenje sem pustil v siru«*. Kranj: Gorenjski muzej.
- Novak, Vilko. 1955. *Odkup in ureditev služnostnih pašnih pravic v Bohinju (Slovenija) = Die Ablösung und Regulierung der weideservituten in Bohinj (Slowenien)*. Ljubljana: Univerzitetna založba.
- Simonič, Peter. 2017. Insularity and the Political Economy of Tourism. An Anthropological Analysis of Zlarin Island and the Trenta Valley. *Etnološka Tribina* 47 (40): 161–179. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15378/1848-9540.2017.40.06>.
- Peattie, Roderick. 1936. *Mountain Geography: A Critique and Field Study*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Podjed, Dan. 2023. Spomini na medčasje: vzratni pogled na izolacijo v času krize. *Etnolog* 33: 83–101.
- Podjed, Dan. 2024. *Krizolacija: znanstveno branje o izoliranih ljudeh*. Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, Založba ZRC. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3986/9789610508656>.
- Ramšak, Mojca. 2000. Zbiranje življenskih zgodb v slovenski etnologiji. *Etnolog* 10: 29–41.
- Repič, Jaka. 2014. Gibanje kot prostorske prakse in ekonomske strategije na primeru družinskega sirarstva v Bohinju. *Ars & Humanitas* 8 (1): 38–57. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4312/ars.8.1.38-57>.
- Rogelja, Nataša. 2014. “Vse po resnici!”: Uporaba biografske metode ob raziskovanju Šavrink. *Dve domovini* 40: 35–46.
- Rosaldo, Renato. 1989. Grief and a Headhunter’s Rage. In *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*, ed. Renato Rosaldo, 1–21. Boston: Beacon.
- Turk Niskač, Barbara. 2021. *O igri in delu: antropologija zgodnjega otroštva*. Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, ZRC SAZU. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3986/9789610505181>.

- Viazzo, Pier Paolo. 1989. *Upland Communities: Environment, Population and Social Structure in the Alps since the Sixteenth Century*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Viazzo, Pier Paolo. 2014. *Alpske skupnosti: Okolje, prebivalstvo in družbena struktura*. Ljubljana: Studia humanitatis.
- Vršnik, Elizabeta. 2022. Local Perception and Knowledge of Changing Alpine Pastures. *Anthropological Notebooks* 28 (3): 136–158. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7463559>.
- Zeitlyn, David. 2008. Life-History Writing and the Anthropological Silhouette. *Social Anthropology* 16 (2): 154–171. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8676.2008.00028.x>.

Izolacija in povezljivost v bohinskih planinah: izkušnje majerce

V članku so obravnavane izkušnje izolacije, samote in osamljenosti v bohinskih planinah v Julijskih Alpah (Slovenija). Življenjska zgodba majerce Cilke Mlakar, ki je več kot petdeset poletij preživela v visokogorski planini Krstenici in nižji planini Zajamniki, ponuja pogled v kompleksno dinamiko družbenih odnosov v geografsko odmaknjenih okoljih. Primer razkriva, da v planinah kljub fizični oddaljenosti, nikoli ni bila zares izolirana ali osamljena, mnogo manj kot npr. v zimskih mesecih, ki jih je preživljala s sorojenci v Bohinjski Češnjici, Ljubljani ali Münchnu. Nasprotno, z dolgoletnim delom je v planini stkala gosto mrežo povezav, najprej s člani družinskega kmetijskega gospodarstva in nekaterimi bližnjimi sorodniki oziroma sorodnicami, poročenih na kmetije v sosedstvu, s člani agrarne skupnosti Bohinjska Češnjica, Podjelje, Koprivnik in drugimi lastniki živine iz Zgornje bohinske doline, predvsem pa s (pra)nečaki in (pra)nečakinjami ter otroki rejcev, ki so ji v planini pomagali pri delu, kot tudi z najemniki in lastniki v počitniške hiše preurejenih stanov in drugimi (ne)naključnimi obiskovalci.

Avtorica spodbija domnevo, da življenje na odročnih gorskih območjih vodi v izolacijo in osamljenost. Čeprav je bila planina Krstenica do sredine 90. let 20. stoletja dostopna le peš in brez telefonske in drugih sodobnih komunikacijskih povezav, je bila Cilka tam intenzivneje vpeta v skupnost kakor v dolini, kjer so bili družbeni stiki drugače strukturirani in bolj omejeni. Z dolgoletnim delom in angažmajem je prispevala k ohranjanju planinskega paše in predelave mleka ter skrbela za prenos znanja in veščin mladim, ki so kot pomočniki poletja preživljali v planini. Poleg tega samota ni negativno stanje – po koncu pašne sezone, ko so rejci odpeljali živino, je ostala še nekaj časa sama v planini. Po obdobju odgovornosti in dela je napočil čas težko pričakovane samote, počitka, branja in miru. Kot pravi, v planini ni bila nikoli osamljena; osamljenost namreč ni odvisna od števila stikov, temveč od njihove kakovosti.

Floating Homes: Homemaking Practices among Seafarers as Strategies against Isolation

Nikolina Hazdovac Bajić

University of Dubrovnik, Croatia

nhazdovacbajic@unidu.hr

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6469-8290>

This article analyzes the multilayered practices of homemaking among the seafarers from a theoretical perspective on the polysemic nature of home, space, and masculinity. In addition, distinction is made between involuntary and involuntary types of isolation at sea (whereby professional sailors belong to the former and adventurous sailors to the latter). The research is based on remote ethnography that included semi-structured interviews, virtual “walks”, informal conversations, and photos.

• **Keywords:** seafarers, homemaking, (in) voluntary isolation, masculinity

Avtorica je preučila večplastne prakse ustvarjanja doma ed pomorščaki s teoretičnega vidika polisemičnosti doma, prostora in moškosti. Poleg tega razlikuje neprostovoljne in prostovoljne izolacije na morju (pri čemer med prve spadajo poklicni pomorščaki, med druge pa pustolovski mornarji oz. jadralci). Raziskava temelji na etnografiji na daljavo, ki je vključevala polstrukturirane intervjuje, »virtualne sprehode«, neformalne pogovore in fotografije.

• **Ključne besede:** pomorščaki, ustvarjanje doma, (ne)prostovoljna izoliranost, moškost

*Četiri noči kroz oluje,
Olupina dok izranja
Svako svoju toplu kuću sanja.
Pomorac sam, majko, na bijelome brodu,
Pomorac sam, majko, u modrome grobu.
(Pomorac sam, majko, Atomsko sklonište, 2007)¹*

Introduction

Social isolation, as one of central concepts in the social sciences, has captured the attention of many classic sociologists, from Durkheim, Marx, Simmel, Tönnies, and Sorokin to more contemporary authors such as Giddens, Bauman, and Castells, to name a few. Multiple and diverse forms of social isolation occur at various levels (individual, group, and social), with various intensity and duration (situational or permanent), in different dimensions (spatial and/or social; urban and rural), and among various social groups and categories (migrants, the elderly, the disabled, the poor, the unemployed,

¹ Four nights through the storms, / As the wreck emerges, / We all dream of our own warm house. / Mother, I'm a seaman on a white ship, / Mother, I'm a seaman in a blue grave (“Mother, I'm a Seaman,” Atomsko sklonište, 2007).

remote communities, minority communities, urban dwellers, members of the underclass, and so forth). This points to the fact that, although certain social groups and situational circumstances are more often associated with social isolation, the concept itself should be grasped theoretically primarily as an emic phenomenon that is fluid and dynamic in nature—a process rather than a fixed category. It is thus carried out as a lived reality in everyday lives and in the formation of individual identities and life narratives, but it also has a significant influence on the physical environment, health and psychological wellbeing, loss of social capital, restructuring of political relations and ideas, economic relations, and economic and cultural global processes.

In sociological theory, social isolation is associated with categories of age, sex, race, ethnicity, education level, work, income, health, migrant status, and personality characteristics (de Jong-Gierveld et al., 2018) and thus often involves an ethical dimension (Bauman, 1990, 2004; Cortina, 2022) and the critique of liberal capitalism (Barry, 1998; Gallie et al., 2003; Salerno, 2003). Social isolation, as the inadequate quality and/or quantity of the social relationships a person has (Kelly, 2019), can refer to the micro-level or lack of individual social ties with (close) people and groups and the macro-level or a lack of inclusion on the broader society and nonexistent or weakened ties to social institutions or social entities beyond the level of individuals (Cacioppo et al., 2014). Seeman (1959) connects social isolation with feelings of powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, and alienation. Other authors associate it with loss, feelings of invisibility, and marginality (Luskin Biordi, Nicholson, 2009), and loneliness (Cacioppo et al., 2014). Although these feelings are intimate and personal, they are “embedded in given forms of social organization and cultural fabrics” (de Jong-Gierveld et al., 2018: 397). In other words, building on Giddens’s structuration theory (Giddens, 1984, 1990), social isolation can be seen as a process that takes place between agency (individual expressions of will activity) and structure (external forces such as social systems, institutions, resources; de Jong-Gierveld et al., 2018; Machielse, 2017; Machielse, Duynham, 2020), which are deeply connected, mutually dependent, and reinforce each other. In addition to the structuration theory approach to social isolation, micro-level isolation is usually sociologically studied from the network theory approach (Hortulanus et al., 2006).²

Another vital aspect is the (in)voluntary nature of social isolation. Whereas voluntarily isolated individuals seek disengagement and actively choose isolation, involuntary isolation is more or less imposed or coercive, meaning that “an individual’s demand for social contacts or communications exceeds the human or situational capability of others” (Luskin Biordi, Nicholson, 2009: 85–86). Although being a seafarer is a career

² The network theory approach to social isolation involves analyzing the size, scope, and strength of an individual’s networks of meaningful personal contacts. Hortulanus et al. (2006) formulate a definition of social isolation based on network approaches oriented toward various aspects of person’s network, and loneliness approaches that emphasize the subjective evaluation of the network.

choice and, as such, it does not conform entirely to the notion of involuntary isolation (as in the case of imprisonment, human trafficking, or concentration camps), it still includes a number of elements that are extremely limiting for an individual: one cannot leave the vessel or leave the job if one wishes to at any given time; the companies' rules and regulations determine seafarers' living conditions; their social contacts are restricted; they cannot freely manage their leisure time (there are no days off during time on board and one is never entirely off duty), company, diet choices, movements, or accommodation; and their access to medical assistance or participation in politics is greatly limited and often impossible. "Involuntary" aspects of seafaring are in line with Erving Goffman's view (2011), which states that a ship can be classified as a total institution, a concept that refers to a place of residence and work in which a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life. In addition, in the emic sense, seafarers often experience their time on board as forced and obligatory. Namely, economic reasons (most seafarers are primary economic providers for their families) that intertwine with the specific type of hegemonic masculinity (as a man and a breadwinner, one needs to endure and overcome any harsh conditions) create the root of this perception. Hence, following an emic perspective as well as the fact that involuntary isolation at least partly "occurs for reasons that are beyond the control of those subject to it" (Barry, 1998: iv), through the text this type of isolation is conceptualized as an "involuntary" isolation. Voluntary isolation at sea, on the other hand, although it may involve confinement or loneliness, includes a range of possibilities that are not available to professional seafarers. Popović et al. (2022), following Rodríguez-Martos Dauer (2009), point out that voluntary isolation at sea includes the ability to choose one's company and to manage the trip itinerary and leisure time, and the freedom not to follow any rules because there are no repercussions for those that do not conform. Starting from the idea that professional seafarers experience their profession and time on board as isolating and somehow inevitable, this article focuses on their attempts to mitigate the feeling of isolation and liminality by employing various homemaking practices onboard. In contrast to this, the analysis also includes an example of voluntary isolation at sea as a separate part, which provides another perspective not only in relation to the feeling of isolation but also in terms of homemaking practices and the notion of home.

After the short introductory part with a very brief sociological perspective on social isolation, the second part offers an overview the sociological and anthropological body of literature on seafarers and the conceptual framework on the polysemic nature of space, home, and masculinity in the seafaring setting. The third part describes the methodological approach, and the fourth focuses on the subjective feelings of isolation, the multilayered practices of homemaking, and the significance of creating domestic spaces in the predominantly masculine constitution of seafarers' lives. The final part of the paper presents some concluding remarks.

Theoretical perspective(s)

Popović et al. (2022) argue that maritime sociology is insufficiently visible within the broader field of sociology due to the fragmented nature of research and the absence of clear sub-disciplinary perspectives. However, there is a growing interest in seafaring in both sociology and anthropology. The literature regards social isolation as a significant problem when spending long periods on a vessel (Acejo, 2012; Esposito, 2013; Fajardo, 2011; Forsyth, Bakston, 1983; Pauksztat, 2023; Penezić et al., 2013; Thomas, 2003). Some authors describe dramatic changes in the shipping industry since the mid-1970s; it became more global, competition grew, and productivity increased, all to the detriment of workload, stress, working hours, the length of time spent in ports, and the general comfort of seafarers (Das, 2018). The seafarer's job is precarious: it is insecure, with no permanent contracts, and highly susceptible to the global market situation and crisis. Seafarers can also sometimes face high costs for identification documents, and shipping companies may violate their contracts, including delayed payment or repatriation (Amante, 2003). In addition, the work environment includes frequent night work, significant challenges in the form of (unsafe) working conditions, exposure to extreme temperatures and weather, inadequate food and accommodation, constant noise and motion, limited movement, and few possibilities for social contact. Life on board occurs in multinational, multilingual, multicultural, primarily male communities, characterized by inequalities in jobs, pay, and rank (Borovnik, 2012).

The literature most often presents ethnographic studies of seafarers' lives on board (Acejo, 2012; Baum-Talmor, 2014; Borovnik, 2012, 2019; Markkula, 2022; Oyaro Gekara, Sampson, 2021) and their family life ashore (Forsyth, Gramling, 1990; Sampson, 2005) analyzing the temporal duality it invokes (Forsyth, Bakston, 1983; Lamvik, 2012; Thomas, 2003), seafarers' performance of masculinity (Mannov, 2021; Thomas, Bailey, 2006; Turgo, 2021), and their mobility through transnational spaces (Acejo, Abila, 2016; Markkula, 2021; McKay, 2021; Sampson, 2003), often criticizing globalization, technocratic practices, exclusivism, capitalism, neoliberalism, neocolonialism, and nationalism (Das, 2018; Dua, 2019; Fajardo, 2011; Kremakova, 2019; McCall Howard, 2012), which this process reveals. Some of these studies indirectly touch upon homemaking practices (Pauksztat, 2023; Thomas, 2003), but only a few of them analyze it in greater detail (Kermakova, 2018; Turgo, 2023).

The issue of space and the imaginary of the ship as a spatial entity are extremely interesting in the context of homemaking practices. On the one hand, ships represent vessels of the global economy, symbols of modernity, fully utilized limited spaces that transport goods and people in which seafarers are only part of the invisible machinery. On the other hand, ships are characterized by mobility, floating, liminality, and borderlessness, and this symbolic discursive representation makes them almost ephemeral phenomena, unreal, placeless, or "hyperspace" (Sampson, 2003). The duality

of freedom and constraint (Borovnik, 2019) associated with ships, however, makes them heterotopias (Foucault, 1986), which can still “hold and transport oppression and resistance, multiple subjectivities, and racialized and classed gender realities” (Fajardo, 2011: 19). This view is different from the imaginary of a ship as a non-place (Augé, 1995) or a non-space that is “without meaning, abolition of a place” (Smithson, 2013: 296). Turgo (2023) argues that ships are predisposed to be non-places because the temporary residents of non-places are irrelevant, following the same patterns or behavior hints during their stay in a non-place. Nevertheless, designed non-places can be enhanced with layers of meanings if complex everyday practices occur in them and if there is an intention to leave an imprint on the space (Turgo, 2023). In a highly mobile and hectic environment, “people desperately need a bit of peace and quiet—and [...] a strong sense of place, of locality, can form one kind of refuge from the hubbub” (Massey, 1994: 151). The clean base of the vessel as a non-place makes it susceptible to constant changes and the creation of temporal and symbolic “moorings” (Borovnik, 2012) with the notion of home.

Seafaring, as a male-dominated industry, and homemaking practices on board can draw on studies on migrant masculinities’ relationship with domestic home space and “mutuality between domesticity and masculinity, where meanings of home and men’s identities are co-constitutive and interrelational” (Walsh, 2011: 517). Seamen usually associate masculinity with their status as workers and providers (Mannov, 2021; Thomas, Bailey, 2006; Turgo, 2021) or “hegemonic masculinity” (Connell, 2005) characterized by endurance, firmness, inflexibility, resourcefulness, and bravery, which are “broadly considered to be ‘macho,’ i.e., being (to at least some extent) assertive and aggressive, courageous, almost invulnerable to threats and problems, and stoic in the face of adversity. It is thereby viewed as associated with behaviors that display courage and strength and that include refusal to acknowledge weakness or to be overcome by adverse events, while discouraging other behaviors such as the expression of emotions or the need to seek the help of others” (McVittie et al., 2017).

However, a closer examination of the daily activities and homemaking practices of seafarers underscores the necessity for a more comprehensive understanding of masculinities, which are far more nuanced and diverse than commonly perceived (Connell, 2005; Turgo, 2021). Furthermore, this study also builds on the theoretical perspectives on homemaking that stem from studies on displaced people (Brun, Fábos, 2015). In both cases, among the displaced people, as well as among seafarers, a home presents “a spatial imaginary, a set of intersecting and variable ideas and feelings, which are related to context, and which construct places, extend across spaces and scales, and connect places” (Blunt, Dowling, cited in Brun, Fábos, 2015: 6–7). Making a home “in-between”—neither there nor here, in multiethnic, multinational, and multilanguage environments for a limited duration, where important factors are policy definitions, displacement experiences, waiting, and the “duration of temporality”—can benefit from



the analysis of home given by Brun and Fábos (2015). These authors differentiate home at three levels: 1) home as the everyday materialities and practices of homemaking that make a space significant; 2) home as a set of values, traditions, memories, and feelings of home; and 3) home as a homeland that exists as a political entity in a global perspective. This study uses the proposed conceptual framework for the interpretation of homemaking practices and the imaginary of home among seafarers.

Methodology

This article offers insight into the variety of emic concepts of isolation and homemaking practices and materialities that provide a semblance of domesticity for people isolated on board for a long period. Research questions included the following topics: subjective feelings of isolation; objects and practices that seafarers miss the most; contents of their suitcases; cabin decoration; spending leisure time, traditions, and routines on board; and symbolism of the home(land).

The qualitative methodology used in this research was multifaceted. I tried to be as resourceful as I could because of the peculiar character of the seafarers' profession. My primary methodological approach was remote ethnography (Podjed, Muršič, 2021). I used online communication tools (mainly WhatsApp, Viber, and Zoom) to talk to the interlocutors on ships worldwide. This approach made it possible not only to cover such large geographical distances but also to include different types of ships and crews and to take virtual walks with the seafarers as they took their phones with them and showed me around their vessels (their mess rooms, cabins, engine rooms, bridges, and decks). Remote walks by video still carried "sensorial elements of human experience and placemaking" (Pink, 2007: 240). I did not video record these walks, but I took notes as the seaman showed me their "material, immaterial and social environments in personally, socially and culturally specific ways" (Pink, 2007: 240). I conducted and recorded twenty-two semi-structured interviews. In some cases, I noticed that the interlocutors were more cooperative and talkative when they were not recorded as part of a formal interview, and so I used informal conversations as well. They also shared with me some photos they had taken on the vessels because they thought I would find them interesting.³

Furthermore, I interviewed an interlocutor that, on several occasions, spent over forty days on his ship, a duration almost equivalent to the contract length of some of the seafarers I spoke with, navigating around Europe. His experience, driven by a desire for adventure, represents a unique perspective on the concept of voluntary isolation. This experience, added in a separate part of the article, provides a valuable contrast and a different emic perspective on loneliness and the notion of home.

³ Authors of the photos gave the permission to the researcher to publish the photos as a part of this study.

This study also incorporated an auto-ethnographic element. With my husband's extensive experience as a seafarer and the longstanding tradition of the maritime profession in our local community, many interlocutors felt more comfortable sharing their experiences with me, still preferring a relaxed, informal, and friendly setting.

The snowball method proved to be the best means of gathering data. Data were collected from June 2023 to June 2024. The interviews were loosely structured, allowing respondents to discuss their views and experiences in their own words and emphasize some important aspects of the topic. Given that the interview structure was relaxed, the duration was from ten minutes to an hour, mostly lasting around twenty-five to thirty minutes. The recorded interviews were transcribed and coded for key themes using NVivo software. In the data analysis part of the paper, the quotations are pseudo-anonymized using identifiers, which include codes for each interlocutor and their age.

The sample consisted of eighteen Croatian seafarers, one Pole, one Lithuanian, and two Filipinos. All interviewees were male, except one female cook.⁴ The materials were collected while the interlocutors were on board. They were part of crews from four different vessels: two small merchant ships (three interlocutors on one and five on the other), one large passenger ship (eight interlocutors), and one large merchant vessel (six interlocutors). The youngest participant was twenty-five and the oldest sixty-one, and the majority of them were in their forties. Most of the interlocutors were Croats because my initial contacts on all four vessels were Croats, and I assume they were more comfortable talking to me in their native language and were more relaxed because I come from a similar social setting (given my family situation). On the other hand, migrant workers were somewhat reluctant, and some of them refused to be interviewed. Some of my interviewees shared that the reason for rejection in some cases was that seafarers (especially migrant workers) felt unprepared and as though they had nothing to contribute, and perhaps were even frightened to participate. In terms of profession, thirteen interlocutors were officers and nine were lower crew members. Although it would be intriguing to explore in greater depth how different groups (based on rank, country of origin, and sex) experience isolation, this was only briefly touched upon due to space limitations. However, these findings suggest intriguing possibilities for further research in these directions.

Isolation on board and taking roots in the open sea

Subjective feelings of isolation: Being away from home

One of my interlocutors told me, quoting Samuel Johnson, that “*being on a ship is being in a jail, with the chance of being drowned*” (DC, 36). Seafarers often use the

⁴ Although the study focuses on masculinity in the seafaring setting, a female cook was included to explore a female perspective and possible other isolating factors that sex can invoke.

prison metaphor when speaking of their time on board. Because life on the vessel is limited in terms of space, social contacts, and choices of activities, it is no wonder that one might experience time on board as incarceration. In addition, some seafarers do not perceive their job as a voluntary choice, but as a necessary obligation or constraint that they must endure. Hence, they concentrate on counting the days until the end of the contract: *"I keep counting, twenty days left, fifteen days left [...]"* (RM, 47) and experience long periods spent on the ship as non-time: *"Basically, I'm throwing my life to the wind just to live the time when I'm at home"* (RM, 47). SG (48) also mentions his fixation on counting the days in non-time:

SG, 48: *I've been counting the days since the beginning, and I already know exactly where I'll be on the next Christmas day, New Year's Eve, and next summer.*

Researcher: *But what about this time in between?*

SG, 48: *I won't live for those 183 days, just count the days so I can live at home for another 183 days.*

Seafaring is a very masculine setting, whether it is voluntary or "involuntary." Seafarers perceive their masculinity primarily through the role of breadwinner or the leading provider for the household: *"I need to feed the family, so I have to endure it while the contract lasts"* (MD, 32). The high salary is a factor that they point out as one of the few positive sides of the job. In addition, it is a source of pride and self-worth to endure such a harsh, dangerous, and sometimes cruel job: *"Life on the ship makes you a little stronger, hardens you, makes a man out of you"* (TP, 58). ML (48) said: *"You have to complete the contract as a man and move on. Then you return home happy."* Having and building self-resilience is one aspect of masculinity, and another is reliability: *"I must know my job, I must be good at it, so others can trust me because this is teamwork"* (SP, 61).

Although the setting at seafaring is masculine, my interlocutors still expressed various emotions related to the experience of isolation. They recounted life situations when they were not there for important events; they said that they missed their family, that they had missed their children growing up, and that they were sometimes frightened in dangerous situations and stressed because of their demanding responsibilities. They named their feelings, albeit tersely, saying things like *"I can be a little depressed"* (RM, 47), *"Sometimes I have a lump in my throat"* (JB, 45), *"It can be difficult"* (MM, 25), *"Sad situations will happen"* (PL, 52), *"I get sad"* (FP, 31), and *"It was emotional"* (DC, 36).

Isolation on board has several dimensions. Seamen are not only isolated from wider society, from their communities and families, but also among themselves. *"Depending on the shift, we can be isolated in the sense that we don't even see the people we're on board with, except at handovers,"* said MB (42) in his interview. He only worked

night shifts and felt lonely. Communication with his family was also difficult because of the work schedule. Later, he sent me a picture of a scratch on the kitchen floor in the form of a little man “*who keeps me company during my shifts*” (Figure 1).

Daily life on board differs depending on the type of vessel and the rank of the seafarer. The hierarchy is stringent on passenger ships. Officers and crew are separated; they rarely communicate other than about work-related matters, and they have separate mess halls and lounges. Officers also have various privileges, such as shop discounts, the possibility of socializing with guests, moving about freely, and dining in restaurants for the guests as long as they wear their uniforms and nametags. Lower-ranking crew can eat only in crew mess rooms with other employees, and they are not allowed to go to the guest area during their free time. On merchant ships,



Figure 1: Scratch on the floor. Photo: MB.

there is also hierarchy and separation, but, because the crew is limited to twenty-five to thirty people, the atmosphere on board is much different, and people are closer to each other. Even though one might expect the feeling of isolation to be less pronounced on passenger ships, some of my interviewees that worked on different types of vessels recount that they always feel isolated and lonely, even more so on passenger ships: “*I worked as a second engineer on a passenger ship, and I never felt more alone. All those people that are on vacation, having fun with their families, while I am missing mine. Other than that, I had to pay for internet services to call home, and it wasn’t cheap*” (MB, 42).

Because the crews on the vessels are usually multiethnic and multilingual, language can be a significant barrier to communication, further isolating individuals on board. JL (34) shared: “*I’m surrounded by a crew of the same nationality, and they talk in their language, forgetting that I don’t understand them. Then I’m looking at my cell phone and trying to understand something [trying to translate]. Even during the day, I’m alone in the kitchen and don’t have time to sit with them during breaks. So, I feel slightly excluded from the rest of the crew.*”⁵

The internet and modern means of communication are seen as a welcome change that reduces isolation and loneliness.⁶ On the other hand, it has increased the isolation

⁵ Although this is a statement from an interview with the female participant, some male interviewees stated similar experiences regarding language barriers.

⁶ Seafarers use smartphones, laptops, tablets, e-readers, and gaming consoles for communication and entertainment.

among the people on board: “*Basically the internet ruined the companionship on the ship. Before, we played cards, we talked, joked, and had fun. And now, after dinner, already at 6 pm everyone is in their cabins, like rabbits in holes [in front of their screens]*” (RM, 47).

When asked what they missed, seafarers put their families in first place, as expected. As the song from the beginning of the text says, on these lonely, remote “white ships,” everybody dreams of their warm homes. In general, my interlocutors missed everything that reminded them of home: certain types of food and “*Mom’s cooking*” (MM, 25); spending time at home and “*My home, it’s funny to say, but I’m really a homebody*” (SG, 48); some personal things “*I miss my bed*” (MB, 42), and usual daily activities “*taking a walk, going to the woods, to the beach, to the cinema*” (FP, 31), “*having a meaningful conversation*” (JL, 34), “*the everyday life of my family*” (MM, 25). GB (44) explained: “*My family and friends, fun, normal life [...]. It’s like the army here, you have a strict routine, getting up, sleeping, working, coffee breaks [...]. This type of military life is a hindrance.*” For some, this type of daily structure is welcomed and appreciated because it organizes their days and leaves little time for contemplating the things they are missing. Nevertheless, by the prison metaphor or “blue grave” metaphor from the song above, interviewees emphasize freedom as something they immensely miss.

Homemaking: Instant homes from a suitcase

Seafarers have a suitcase half ready even during their time home, half packed with things they always carry on board. Among these, personal medicines stand out as one of the most crucial items: “*I carry a lot of medicine. That is what I do not go without. My suitcase is always ready with things I don’t go without. We’ve got medicines on board, but usually the instructions are in another language, so you don’t even know what they’re for. I’m skeptical about it*” (IK, 58).

Another essential thing seafarers carry is work clothes: “*I bring work clothes, sometimes even shoes, because when you go on a ship for the first time you never know what’s in store for you*” (SP, 61). Bringing medicines and work clothes indicates the need to be self-sufficient and able to take care of oneself as part of a masculine identity. Other things that they carry fall slightly out of the essentialized masculinity concept: certain types of food (sweets, instant food, and drinks)⁷ and all kinds of random things that make their living spaces more comfortable, domestic, and familiar: pillows, bedding, coffee cups, calendars, humidifiers, clocks, kitchen utensils, cleaning products, books, and so on. The older generation still carries framed family photos.

⁷ My interlocutors from Croatia mention Čokolino instant cereal and Cedevita juice powder, which are popular in Croatia and are signature tastes and smells that were already mass produced by food industries in the former Yugoslavia.

SG (48) told me: *“I like to rest my head on my own pillow. I’m not too fond of those on the vessels—you never know what you’ll get. Moreover, I have my pillowcase. I also have a clock, and I feel at home when I look at it at night.”*

Seafarers that are on the same vessel for a long time are more relaxed, and so they leave their belongings in their cabins when they go home, although they put them away because another person resides in the same space during that time: *“A few times, I unexpectedly got transferred to other ships, and then you realize how you settled in and how much you feel like the vessel is ‘yours.’ I leave lots of personal stuff here, so I don’t have to carry it all the time, and I can travel with a small suitcase”* (AR, 59).

For some seafarers, the struggle with constant uncertainty about returning to the same vessel makes it difficult to relax and leave their personal belongings behind, and so they carry everything with them all the time: *“I come with a suitcase that looks like I’m taking half the house with me. I carry everything, including pillows. I bought the biggest suitcase I could find. When I get on the ship, people ask me if I ever intend to return home”* (SG, 48).

For women on board, the situation is more complicated due to efforts to protect privacy and avoid unpleasant situations, especially in the context of sex differences and excessive intrusion into the intimacy of the opposite sex. My interlocutor said: *“I try not to leave anything. I share a cabin, so there’s that. Besides, I never know if I’m coming back. The previous cook, a woman, left plenty of her personal belongings, and she never came back. Her underwear and other very personal stuff remained. That’s not nice. Some things are private. So that’s why I’m careful. I don’t want somebody to access my privacy at this level”* (JL, 34).

The private domain of a cabin

If there is a semblance of privacy on board, it is a cabin space. It was endearing to learn from some of my interlocutors that showed me their cabins that they cleaned and tidied them up beforehand. The cabins are quite small, usually furnished with essential items (a bed, a table and chair, and a wardrobe) and sometimes with additional items for comfort (a refrigerator, armchair, or sofa). Most of them have a bathroom, but on some older vessels they do not. Officers’ cabins on passenger vessels are similar to guest cabins, whereas lower crew cabins are much more modest. The vessel staff maintains the cleanliness of the officers’ cabins. On merchant vessels, the crew clean the cabins themselves, and the captain or chief mate checks the state of the cabins every week.

During our video walks, I felt a sense of pride and homeliness when the seafarers showed me around. They showed me some things they made themselves: corners with shelves, freshly painted floors in common areas, and decorations in social areas. The photos they sent me depicted the storage areas where they stow their belongings when they disembark, the furniture they skillfully made, and the corners of their cabins (Figures 2–4).



Most pictures show objects that, although they speak about the person's individuality and express the narrative of self, remain in the domain of simple, useful objects. There are almost no decorations in the private areas of the cabins. Somewhat different from that is a very unusual cabin. It belongs to the captain of a smaller merchant ship, RM (47). In his interview, he told me that he insists that his space be clean and tidy, *"maybe even excessively so."* It is not easy, he stated, when a colleague you are changing with has somewhat different habits (during his time off, his colleague uses this cabin). Because he likes to keep himself busy, he redecorated his entire cabin with material he could find during his last contract. He put up some new flowery wallpaper, which was *"a bit feminine, so the crew teased me a little, but also they liked it"* (Figure 5). His involvement in decorating the cabin partly stems from his officer position because he has somewhat greater security and permanence on board. However, his initiative and desire to invest work and time in his space are greater factors.

ML (48) has been a chief engineer on the same vessel for over eight years, and so he has settled in the specific space of "his" ship. He said about his cabin: *"Since I have been here for so long, I've adapted it to myself. I see it as my space ... Your cabin is everything that's 'yours' on a vessel, like a bedroom at home—a very intimate space."*

Some of my interlocutors shared that they find it challenging to sleep in the cabins. The environment can be noisy and uncomfortable, and during rough seas seamen sometimes secure themselves to the bed to keep from falling out. Despite these conditions, seafarers make significant efforts to personalize their cabins, incorporating a variety



Figure 2: Cabin on a bulk carrier. Photo: IK.



Figure 3: Cabin on a merchant vessel. Photo: JL.



Figure 4: DIY corner. Photo: MB.



Figure 5: Captain's cabin on a small merchant ship. Photo: RM.

of practices and materialities to make them as comfortable and as much “their own” as possible. This process of personalization is a way for seafarers to express their own conceptions of masculinity, revealing it as a multidimensional phenomenon that can encompass practices and materialities not typically associated with its essentialized concept.

For seafarers, cabins are one of the few outlets that allow them to create a semblance of domesticity and comfort, as well as a venue to express their individuality and personal interests. Nevertheless, this is a very temporal occurrence. They do not become attached to the space; they are ready to leave it at any moment and do not remember it when they leave it: *“I have changed many vessels so far. All those cabins are mixed up in my memory. I remember some in which I tried to adapt something to myself because I invested some time and effort and spent more time there, maybe. But, no, in general, these were all transit stations”* (IK, 58).

Traditions and routines

Depending on the vessel's type and size and the seafarer's rank, the duration of work shifts can vary. Hence, leisure time may be split between the shifts or rather short. Most vessels are equipped with a gym or a crew bar, depending on the size of the vessel and the company it belongs to. Passenger ships have many additional features that are not available to the lower crew but only to the officers.



Figure 6: Crew band on a merchant vessel. Photo: JS.

Spending leisure time varies significantly depending on all the factors mentioned. Among the most usual ways of spending leisure time are watching movies and TV series, reading and listening to audiobooks, listening to music, talking to one's family and friends, surfing on the internet and reading news, playing video games, and working out in the gym. Crews that can watch TV do not miss significant sports events (games and matches). Some interlocutors mentioned that they liked to shop online: *"I buy various things, tools, some stuff for the house, but also clothes and things that I think my family would like. I feel like I'm more involved in their lives this way. I like the idea that my children wear the clothes I chose for them"* (DC, 36).

Most of the leisure practices mentioned relate to the outside world, life on the land, or staying in touch with daily events. Depending on the crew and their sociability, they can more or less hang out together by playing cards, darts, or table football. Filipinos have routines such as singing karaoke: *"I love karaoke. That's when we have the best time. I'm glad when the rest of the crew joins in, not only Filipinos"* (JS, 28). Some crews set up bands so there is singing and fun at weekend parties (Figure 6).

If there is an opportunity, seafarers can get off the vessel or take a walk. Again, depending on the vessel, they can take walks along the deck, fish, play sports, and so on. Crews that have been together longer *"begin to look like small dysfunctional families or henhouses with gossiping and all"* (ML, 48). All those masculine activities are thus imbued with some practices that are not usually associated with masculinity, such

as gossiping or opening up about one's problems and sharing thoughts and feelings: *"When I'm good with some of my colleagues, we talk, we share experiences. That helps me. You can hear what's bothering the other person and share the troubles."* Masculinity on board also means that one needs to make compromises and sometimes give up and let others overpower you: *"You have to be smart on board and make many compromises. You're closed in with others and need to know when to give in to win later, when to stand up for yourself, and when to withdraw. This is a male environment, and you can't allow yourself to be trampled on, but you also have to be adaptable in some situations"* (MM, 25).

Other significant traditions and rituals are weekly cookouts, especially popular on merchant vessels. They bring together the entire crew in an informal gathering. Other than that, celebrations for major holidays such as Christmas and New Year have their own rituals, which include decorating the space, decorating the Christmas tree, and preparing special food in a relaxed and festive atmosphere (Figures 7 and 8).

Symbolism of the home(land)

The notion of a home includes a homeland dimension, which refers to the country of origin from a global perspective. Because most of my interlocutors were Croats, this section focuses on representing Croatia in the context of the vessels I had access to.

The most visible notion of a country is through national emblems such as a flag and coat of arms. These can be found scattered on walls around the merchant vessels. Often, they are in a sports context associated with sports clubs and fan props (Figures 9 and 10).



Figure 7: Cookout on a merchant vessel. Photo: DC.



Figure 8: Christmas on board. Photo: MB.



Figure 9: Croatian symbols on a merchant vessel. Photo: ML.



Figure 10: Croatian symbols on a merchant vessel. Photo: MM.

On passenger vessels, every officer must wear a name tag, which includes his or her name, rank, and country of origin (Figure 11). Creating an image of a traditional Croatian seafarer that is respected and good at his job is something that my interlocutors stressed as important for them. Because they work in a globalized, multinational environment, some of them feel like they are representatives of a nation and maritime tradition they inherited from their ancestors: *“Both my father and grandfather were seafarers. My son is a seafarer, too. Croats in this branch have always been recognized as good and capable workers. It’s our tradition”* (RM, 47).



Figure 11: Name tag of a Croatian officer on a passenger vessel. Photo: GB.

Younger seafarers I talked to prefer to work with a multinational crew, but with a specific hierarchy: *“I prefer to work in a multinational crew when officers are ours [Croats], and the lower crew is mixed. Then the situation on board is more serious, and there is more respect”* (MLJ, 29). This brings to the fore underlying racial, national, and class prejudices.

Voluntary isolation at sea: Isolation, homemaking, and masculinity

DR's experience is an example of voluntary isolation at sea. He was almost sixty when he decided to sail around Europe in his seven-and-a-half-meter-long, 120-year-old wooden boat: *"I sat in my small boat, and I got it into my head that I would go all over Europe on that ship."* This act was somewhat out of character for him as a respectable family man with a well-established business.

In contrast with the "involuntary" nature of isolation that other seafarers in this study experience, DR chose the direction and time of the journeys by himself, same as the routes and the length of the voyages, whether and when he would have company on board, who it would be, and when he would finally go home. He isolated himself at sea out of a desire for adventure. His budget was not large, and he often found himself without funds. He lived a modest lifestyle, trying to get by as inexpensively as possible: *"It was all very modest; it could not be more modest. I did not pay anything anywhere that I did not have to."*

When he first set out, he was inexperienced with sailing and lacked equipment. Because of this, he got into various perilous situations. Nonetheless, he kept returning to sailing and long periods of isolation at sea. In his interview, he describes his time in isolation as sometimes challenging, lonely, and demanding. During his time alone, he experienced complete isolation and separation from the world, but he did not always associate it with negative feelings. Although being alone at some moments was not easy—*"Being alone is the worst thing sometimes. You have no one to talk to, no one to consult with"*—he argued that solitude was sometimes easier than the responsibility of making difficult decisions for somebody else or being in bad company. In addition, he did not feel fear but excitement and adventure in dangerous situations. DR associates his time on board with *"freedom, solitude, decision-making, relying on oneself and managing as best you know in impossible situations."* He rarely communicated with his family and friends at home.

Regarding his feeling of home and homemaking practices, quite contrary to the seafarers that are "involuntarily" isolated, he took only a few things with him, mostly those that were useful such as food, clothes, a few utensils, some equipment, and a first aid kit. There were no personal things or artifacts that would make him more at home. He had no comforts and lived in modest conditions, without things that would create a semblance of home or coziness: *"What do I even need? I learned how little a person needs."* Moreover, he had no artifact reminiscent of home in his daily life. He had no recurring practices, routines, or traditions that would create familiarity or homeliness: *"Every day was different. If I could call it a routine, then the only routine I had was to get off the ship and drink something strong in every port I arrived in."* He did not engage in many conversations or make contacts while he was in ports. He did not observe much of the local life, scenery, or cultural heritage; *"my only goal was to sail away as soon as possible."* However, he recounted: *"When I got to Istanbul,*



I rented a beautiful apartment in a hotel overlooking the Bosphorus. Nevertheless, I couldn't sleep. In the middle of the night, I left, returned to my ship, and slept there like a baby." In contrast to other seafarers, he saw his boat as a means of isolation and adventure rather than a home. So he preferred to stay on it during his trips, isolated from the land life. Speaking of the conceptualization of home from a global perspective, as a homeland, he said that during his voyages he had a Croatian flag only because it is a prerequisite for sailing on international seas. He never felt like a representative of a nation, even more so because just a few people recognized it. Hence, the act of voluntary isolation, in this case, is mainly associated with individuality and an act of personal freedom while rejecting collective connotations.

DR recounts his voyages as a memorable time: *"I will remember that time forever. I experienced so many things and learned a lot about myself."* He claimed that he did not feel fear, even in some life-threatening situations, but only excitement and adventure. Various aspects of his experience that came up during his interview—such as scarcity, discomfort, survival in difficult living conditions, endurance, courage, and facing fears in harsh and dangerous situations—are in alliance with a specific concept of masculinity. Similar to other seafarers I talked to, he stressed these masculine concepts of self-resilience and resourcefulness as something positive he gained from life on board.

Conclusion: Connecting the dots

One can conceive of a home as a place that includes familiarity and intimacy, common frames of reference across space and time with close people, and an immediate and broader community. The seafarers leave their homes for long periods. This experience affects their perception of isolation and marginality and of life as floating on the fringes of their significant groups.

The conceptual framework of a home by Brun and Fábos (2015) identifies three distinct layers: home as the everyday materialities and practices of homemaking that make a space significant; home as a set of values, traditions, memories, and feelings of home; and home as a homeland in a global perspective. These three perspectives can be traced in the seafarers' homemaking practices in time- and space-mobile settings. Regarding the first layer, my interlocutors showed me the rich body of practices and significant artifacts instrumental in their everyday lives, giving character and a stamp of personality to the spaces they inhabit. Homemaking is a strategy that is an "affective, embodied response to an assessment of a place as 'like home / not like home'" (Butcher, 2010: 33). In this regard, time is of particular interest because, although objects and practices of homemaking can be and are diverse, meaningful, and essential, they are still temporal and take place in time-limited sections of contract duration for each seafarer. Although this time is sometimes perceived as a waste of life or non-life, or

non-time (whereas the “real” home on land represents time), nevertheless the practices and materialities they have shown me testify to awareness of duration of temporality, which is then filled with feelings, traditions, rituals, values, and memories. These are constitutive of the second layer of the home proposed by Brun and Fábos (2015). Finally, the third layer of home relates to positioning a home(land) in the global perspective, calling upon national traditions and successes, the significance of seafaring tradition, and the need to represent it all or to be “the ambassador” of the home(land) by leaving the material marks or behaving in a certain way.

Homemaking is generally still a gendered area associated primarily with femininity (Turgo, 2023). However, as some previous research has already shown, masculinity in the context of seafaring is a much broader and variable phenomenon (Mannov, 2021; Thomas, Bailey, 2006; Turgo, 2021). Furthermore, masculinity and homemaking are proven to be not mutually exclusive but interrelated and congruent (Walsh, 2011). Specific settings (as vessels are) can challenge not only the essentialized hegemonic concept of masculinity but also one of home, which, as was shown above, can be made in precisely determined time sections, in isolation, and in perceived non-time and designed non-space. Even though seafaring is a highly masculine context, seemingly feeding into a singular “macho” type of masculinity, observed practices and activities point to multifaceted, diverse, and complex connections between masculinity and homemaking. Occurrences of expressing emotions, decorating a space and keeping it clean, buying clothes and household items online, choosing more understated reactions in certain situations, entertaining gossip or confiding one’s problems and feelings, and creating close relationships with others all show a richness of practices connoted with home and domesticity that at the same time question the singular concept of masculinity, as well as the gendered notion of homemaking. However, despite the observed nuances of masculinity, in the context of seafarers’ life on board they still remain locked within a heteronormative, class, and racial framework.

Regarding voluntary isolation at sea and homemaking, it is significantly different compared to the “involuntary” experience. First, time spent at sea is regarded as substantially rich, memorable, and essential, and isolation is desirable and implies freedom and life-changing adventure. In the face of these premises, homemaking is virtually non-existent; space is ascetic, with very few useful things, without specific routines or rituals, without a notion that a boat represents some national entity or a homeland. The ship is seen instrumentally as a means or symbol of adventure. Voluntary isolation at sea is thus a very intimate and individual act, mainly associated with the expression of separation from the world (and home) and personal freedom while rejecting collective connotations. In contrast, the “involuntarily” isolated mostly yearn for a collective that they are forced to stay away from and that they try to connect with in every possible way. Hence, in this context, voluntary isolation has no common ground with “involuntary” isolation apart from general notions of endurance, firmness, resourcefulness,

and bravery that feed into the concept of hegemonic masculinity commonly connoted with the sea and navigation.

Reflecting on seafaring and homemaking, I argue that seafarers are not simply invisible wheels in the globalized machinery of capitalism or short-term inhabitants of the non-spaces. Even though they disregard and belittle their time on board, the life they lead there is substantive and significant, despite its liminality and transience. Rooting is performed through practices, spaces, relationships, memory, traditions, and habits, even though it requires creating a home anew every time, for some, with each new contract.

The analysis of homemaking in, what seems for some of my interlocutors, a permanent “duration of temporalities”⁸ (Brun, Fábos, 2015) has the potential to significantly extend the understanding of how ideas, experiences, and feelings of home are manifested, challenged, and changing. This is particularly relevant in the context of hegemonic masculinity, which is usually connected with the notion of navigation and the sea, whether voluntary or “involuntary.” Furthermore, it can provide profound insight into the emic experiences of isolation, resilience, and struggle to create meaning and take root, even when floating in the open sea.

Acknowledgements

The article is a result of the research project Isolated People and Communities in Slovenia and Croatia which was financially supported by the Croatian Science Foundation (ISOLATION IPS-2022-02-3741).

References

- Acejo, Iris. 2012. Seafarers and Transnationalism: Ways of Belongingness Ashore and Aboard. *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 33 (1): 69–84. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2012.633317>.
- Acejo, Iris and Sanley S. Abila. 2016. Rubbing Out Gender: Women and Merchant Ships. *Journal of Organizational Ethnography* 5 (2): 123–138. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1108/JOE-01-2016-0004>.
- Amante, Maragtas S.V. 2003. *Filipino Global Seafarers: A Profile*. Cardiff: SIRC, Cardiff University.
- Augé, Marc. 1995. *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. London: Verso.
- Barry, Brian. 1998. Social Exclusion, Social Isolation and the Distribution of Income. *London School of Economics STICERD Research Paper* No. CASE012. URL: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1158903>.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. 1990. *Modernity and the Holocaust*. Cambridge: Polity.

⁸ Permanent “duration of temporalities” here implies limited segments of time (on board) that are constantly repeated, and so they are presented in the seafarers’ memory as uninterrupted time.

- Bauman, Zygmunt. 2004. *Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Baum-Talmor, Polina. 2014. From Sea to Shore: Ethnographic Account of Seafarers' Experience Onboard Merchant Ships. *Sage Research Methods Cases Part 1*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4135/978144627305013508492>.
- Borovnik, Maria. 2012. The Mobilities, Immobilities and Moorings of Work-Life on Cargo Ships. *Sites - a Journal of Social Anthropology and Cultural Studies* 9 (1): 59–82. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11157/sites-vol9iss1id194>.
- Borovnik, Maria. 2019. Seafarers and Work: Endless, Sleepless, Floating Journeys. In *Living with the Sea: Knowledge, Awareness and Action*, eds. Mike Brown and Kimberley Peters, 131–146. London: Routledge.
- Brun, Cathrine and Anita Fábos. 2015. Making Homes in Limbo? A Conceptual Framework. *Refuge. Canada's Journal on Refugees* 31 (1): 5–17. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.40138>.
- Butcher, Melissa. 2010. From 'Fish Out of Water' to 'Fitting In': The Challenge of Re-Placing Home in a Mobile World. *Population, Space and Place* 16 (1): 23–36. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.575>.
- Cacioppo, Stephanie, John P. Capitanio, and John T. Cacioppo. 2014. Toward a Neurology of Loneliness. *Psychological Bulletin* 140 (6): 1464–1504. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0037618>.
- Connell, R. W. 2005. *Masculinities*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Cortina, Adela. 2022. *Aporophobia: Why We Reject the Poor Instead of Helping Them*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Das, Sonia Neela. 2018. The Unsociability of Commercial Seafaring: Language Practice and Ideology in Maritime Technocracy. *American Anthropologist* 121 (1): 62–75. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.13161>.
- de Jong-Gierveld, Jenny, Theo G. van Tilburg, and Pearl A. Dykstra. 2018. New Ways of Theorizing and Conducting Research in the Field of Loneliness and Social Isolation. In *The Cambridge Handbook of Personal Relationships*, eds. Anita L. Vangelisti and Daniel Perlman, 391–404. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316417867.031>.
- Dua, Jatin. 2019. The Abandoned Seafarer: Networks of Care and Capture in the Global Shipping Economy. *History and Anthropology* 30 (5): 497–502. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02757206.2019.1638776>.
- Esposito, Maurizio. 2013. The Social World of Seafarers. A Sociological Research in Central Italy. *Advances in Applied Sociology* 3 (4): 199–205. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/aasoci.2013.34027>.
- Fajardo, Kale Bantigue. 2011. *Filipino Crosscurrents: Oceanographies of Seafaring, Masculinities, and Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Forsyth, Craig J. and William B. Bankston. 1983. The Merchant Seaman as a Social Type: A Marginal Life-Style. *Free Inquiry in Creative Sociology* 11 (1): 8–12.
- Forsyth, Craig J. and Robert Gramling. 1990. Adaptive Familial Strategies Among Merchant Seamen. *Family and Economic Issues* 11: 183–198. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00987080>.
- Foucault, Michel. 1986. Of Other Spaces. *Diacritics* 16 (1): 22–27. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/464648>.
- Gallie, Duncan, Serge Paugam, and Sheila Jacobs. 2003. Unemployment, Poverty and Social Isolation: Is There a Vicious Circle of Social Exclusion? *European Societies* 5 (1): 1–32. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461669032000057668>.



- Giddens, Anthony. 1984. *The Constitution of Society*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Giddens, Anthony. 1990. *The Consequences of Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Goffman, Erving. 2011. *Azili: eseji o društvenom položaju pacijenata bolnica za mentalno obolele i drugih utočenika*. Novi Sad: Mediterran Publishing.
- Hortulanus, Roelof, Anja Machielse, and Ludwien Meeuwesen. 2006. *Social Isolation in Modern Society*. London: Routledge.
- Kelly, Danielle, Artur Steiner, Micaela Mazzei, and Rachel Baker. 2019. Filling a Void? The Role of Social Enterprise in Addressing Social Isolation and Loneliness in Rural Communities. *Journal of Rural Studies* 70 (1): 225–236. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2019.01.024>.
- Kremakova, Milena. 2019. Navigating Postsocialism: Bulgarian Seafarers' Working Lives before and after 1989. *Anthropology of Work Review* XL (2): 112–121. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/awr.12182>.
- Lamvik, Gunnar M. 2012. The Filipino Seafarer: A Life between Sacrifice and Shopping. *Anthropology in Action* 19 (1): 22–31. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3167/aia.2012.190104>.
- Luskin Biordi, Diana and Nicholas R. Nicholson. 2009. Social Isolation. In *Chronic Illness: Impact and Intervention*, eds. Pamala D. Larsen and Ilene Morof Lubkin, 85–115. Sudbury: Jones and Bartlett Publishers.
- Machielse Anja. 2017. A Theoretical Approach of Social Isolation: Mechanism of Emergence and Persistence. *Innovation in Aging* 30 (1): 1029. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/geron/igx004.3749>.
- Machielse, Anja and Joachim Duyndam. 2020. Strategies of Socially Isolated Older Adults: Mechanisms of Emergence and Persistence. *Journal of Aging Studies* 53: 1–7. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaging.2020.100852>.
- Mannov, Adrienne. 2021. “Nowhere near Somalia, Mom” on Containerizing Maritime Piracy and Being Good Men. *Focaal—Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology* 89: 40–51. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3167/fcl.2021.890104>.
- Markkula, Johanna. 2021. ‘We Move the World’: The Mobile Labor of Filipino Seafarers. *Mobilities* 16 (2): 164–177. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2021.1880129>.
- Markkula, Johanna. 2022. The Ship. *History and Anthropology* 33 (2): 188–195. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02757206.2022.2066097>.
- Massey, Doreen. 1994. *Space, Place and Gender*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- McCall Howard, Penny. 2012. Workplace Cosmopolitanization and “The Power and Pain of Class Relations” at Sea. *Focaal—Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology* 62: 55–69. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3167/fcl.2012.620105>.
- McKay, Steven C. 2021. Navigating Race: Intersectional Boundary-Making Onboard Transnational Ships. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 45 (4): 697–717. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2021.1945647>.
- McVittie, Chris, Julie Hepworth, and Karen Goodall. 2017. Masculinities and Health: Whose Identities, Whose Constructions? In *The Psychology of Gender and Health*, eds. Maria Pilar Sánchez-López and Rosa M. Limiñana-Gras, 119–141. London: Academic Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-803864-2.00004-3>.
- Oyaro Gekara, Victor and Helen Sampson, eds. 2021. *The World of the Seafarer Qualitative Accounts of Working in the Global Shipping Industry*. Cham: Springer.
- Pauksztat, Birgit. 2023. “Team Play”: Seafarers’ Strategies for Coping with Job Demands of Short Sea Cargo Shipping Lines. In *Maritime Professions: Issues and Perspectives*, eds.

- Agnieszka Kołodziej-Durnaś, Frank Sowa, and Marie C. Grasmeier, 185–204. Leiden, Boston: Brill. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004518841_009.
- Penezić, Zvezdan, Ana Slišković, and Daria Kevrić. 2013. Neki korelati zadovoljstva životom kod pomoraca. *Suvremena psihologija* 16 (1): 83–93.
- Pink, Sarah. 2007. Walking with Video. *Visual Studies* 22 (3): 240–252. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14725860701657142>.
- Podjed, Dan and Rajko Muršič. 2021. To Be or Not to Be There: Remote Ethnography During the Crisis and Beyond. *Etnolog* 31: 33–49.
- Popović, Toni, Renata Relja, and Tea Gutović. 2022. Contributions to the Debate on the Ship as a Total Institution: A Survey among Dalmatian Seafarers. *Sociologija i prostor* 60 (2): 263–286. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5673/sip.60.2.3>.
- Rodríguez-Martos Dauer, Ricardo. (2009). *The Merchant Vessel: A Sociological Analysis*. Barcelona: Edicions UPC.
- Salerno, Roger A. 2003. *Landscapes of Abandonment: Capitalism, Modernity, and Estrangement*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Sampson, Helen. 2003. Transnational Drifters or Hyperspace Dwellers: An Exploration of the Lives of Filipino Seafarers Aboard and Ashore. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 26 (2): 253–277. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0141987032000054420>.
- Sampson, Helen. 2005. Left High and Dry? The Lives of Women Married to Seafarers in GOA and Mumbai. *Ethnography* 6 (1): 61–85. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1466138105055661>.
- Seeman, Melvin. 1959. On the Meaning of Alienation. *American Sociological Review* 24 (6): 783–791. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/2088565>.
- Smithson, Robert. 2013. Interview. *Anthropology & Aesthetics* 63–64: 289–298.
- Thomas, Michelle. 2003. *Lost at Sea and Lost at Home: The Predicament of Seafaring Families*. Cardiff: Seafarers International Research Centre.
- Turgo, Nelson. 2021. Manning the Waves: Masculinity Shift Amongst Filipino Seafarers in the Age of Precarity. *Gender Work and Organization* 28 (4): 1562–1578. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12710>.
- Thomas, Michelle and Nicholas Bailey. 2006. Square Pegs in Round Holes? Leave Periods and Role Displacement in UK-Based Seafaring Families. *Work, Employment & Society* 20 (1): 129–149. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017006061277>.
- Turgo, Nelson. 2023. The Ship as Home: Homemaking Practices Amongst Filipino Seafarers at Sea. *Mobilities* 19 (2): 245–259. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2023.2257396>.
- Walsh, Katie. 2011. Migrant Masculinities and Domestic Space: British Home-Making Practices in Dubai. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 36 (4): 516–529. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-5661.2011.00442.x>.



Plavajoči domovi: prakse ustvarjanja doma med pomorščaki kot protiizolacijske strategije

Ko govorimo o pomorščakih in njihovem načinu življenja, se skoraj ni mogoče izogniti konceptu izolacije. V članku so analizirane večplastne prakse ustvarjanja doma s teoretičnega vidika polisemičnosti doma, prostora in moškosti. Gospodinske prakse med pomorščaki se izražajo v uporabi in izdelavi artefaktov, ohranjanju tradicij in ritualov, ustvarjanju spominov in predstavljanju domovine. Opazovane prakse in dejavnosti kažejo na kompleksne povezave med moškostjo in gospodinjstvom. Izražanje čustev, okrasitev prostora in vzdrževanje čistoče, spletno nakupovanje oblačil in gospodinjskih predmetov, izbira skromnejših odzivov v določenih okoliščinah, opravljanje, zaupanje težav in občutkov ter ustvarjanje tesnih razmerij z drugimi, vse to kaže na bogastvo praks, povezanih z domom in domačnostjo. Omenjeno hkrati prinaša pomislek o singularnem konceptu moškosti, pa tudi o spolno opredeljeni podobi gospodinjstva. V tem članku je izolacija razumljena predvsem kot emski konstrukt. Zato ločimo prostovoljno in neprostovoljno izolacijo, pri čemer poklicni pomorščaki spadajo med neprostovoljno izolirane, prva pa se nanaša bolj na pustolovsko in zabavno, sproščenejšo vrsto jadriranja. Ugotovitve kažejo, da se ti perspektivi bistveno ločita po gospodinjskih praksah in doživljanju prostora. Raziskava temelji na oddaljeni etnografiji, ki je vključevala polstrukturirane spletne intervjuje z 22 profesionalnimi pomorščaki (18 je bilo Hrvatov) in enim avanturistom, fotografije, video in avdio virtualne »sprehode« po plovilih ter neformalne pogovore s pomorščaki.

The Island of Žirje: Challenging Claims of Isolation

Peter Simonič

Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia
peter.simonic@ff.uni-lj.si
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7003-0668>

The article examines the influence and remnants of economic and political systems as layers of time on the remote island of Žirje in Croatia, focusing on developments from the sixteenth century onwards. The author explores changes in local economic, political, legal, religious, spatial, and kinship arrangements to shed light on contemporary ethnographic realities. By adopting a relational approach to studying Žirje, the author challenges the notion of islands and cultures as isolated entities.

▪ **Keywords:** Dalmatia, Šibenik archipelago, agriculture, pasture, industry, tourism, inheritance, world systems, relational analysis

V članku so analizirani učinki in ostanki ekonomskih in političnih sistemov kot plasti časa na oddaljenem otoku Žirje na Hrvaškem, s poudarkom na razvoju od 16. stoletja do danes. Avtor je raziskoval spremembe v lokalnih gospodarskih, političnih, pravnih, verskih, prostorskih in sorodstvenih ureditvah, da bi pojasnil sodobno etnografsko realnost. Z relacijskim pristopom raziskave Žirja v časovnem, prostorskem in družbenem kontekstu avtor spodbija dojemanje otokov in kultur kot izoliranih entitet.

▪ **Ključne besede:** Dalmacija, Šibeniško otočje, kmetijstvo, pašništvo, industrija, turizem, nasledstvo, svetovni sistemi, relacijska analiza

Introduction

In more than ten years of research in Dalmatia, I have visited the islands of Zlarin, Mljet, Hvar, Šolta, Silba, and Žirje. I have visited many other Adriatic islands as a tourist or participant in various conferences. Whereas other ethnographic surveys and visits were mainly aimed at collecting comparative Dalmatian material, I stayed on Zlarin and Žirje and systematically gathered research material for over a year: at different times of the year, with different emphases, and with different interlocutors (thirty in Žirje). The fact that I carried out the most work in the Šibenik archipelago and on the island of Žirje is the result of some insights discussed below.

First, a great deal of historical, ethnological, geographical, demographic, and folklore research has been carried out in the Šibenik archipelago, but contemporary social and ecological processes are rarely recorded and evaluated (in ethnology). The sources on Žirje go back to Pliny, quoted by the naturalist and geologist Abbe Alberto Fortis in his 1774 travelogue *Viaggio in Dalmazia* (published in English as *Travels into Dalmatia* in 1778). English travel writers from the nineteenth century wrote more often about the town of Šibenik than about its islands (see Šišak, 2019). Several important texts were written in the twentieth century: Ćiril Metod Iveković's article 'Otok Žirje' (The Island of Žirje) in the journal *Starohrvatska prosvjeta* (1927); the book *Sela šibenskoga kotara*

(Villages of the Šibenik Region) by Don Krst Stošić (1941; two chapters are devoted to the history, institutions, traditional economy, and culture of Žirje); and the volume *Agrarni odnosi na otoku Žirju (od XVII–XIX stoljeća)* (Agricultural Relations on the Island of Žirje, Seventeenth to Nineteenth Century) by Josip Ante Soldo (1973; an excellent overview of Žirje’s agriculture based on archival monastic sources). The work of the Zagreb Institute of Ethnology and Folklore on Zlarin in the early 1980s is worth mentioning (Bezić, 1981; Muraj, 1981a, 1981b; Rajković, 1981). One contemporary ethnological researcher of the Šibenik region is the professor and museum curator Jadran Kale (1994, 1995–1996, 2019, 2023; Fuerst-Bjeliš, Kale, 2018). The Zagreb Institute for Migration Research and the Zadar Centre for Adriatic Onomastic Research have also analyzed data from the Šibenik archipelago (Lajić et al., 2001; Lončar, Klempić Bogadi, 2016). The most important project on the ethnological history of Žirje is the anthology *Žirajski libar* (The Žirje Book, 1994), edited by Eduard Kale, a sociologist and cultural studies specialist born on the island. The anthology contains some of the aforementioned works about Žirje and other basic studies, as well as some more recent and original reflections on the island, visions of tourism, and the Croatian War of Independence. Most of the above references offer a temporally, spatially, or thematically limited insight into Žirje—an integrated and comparative socio-ecological and historical overview of the island has not yet been written. By juxtaposing the references, one can identify socio-ecological processes on and around the island of Žirje and evaluate some general observations about Dalmatian society and the environment on the island. Most importantly, an attempt can be made to explain its ethnographic contemporaneity based on available historiographic, linguistic, geographical, demographic, and other sources.

The Šibenik archipelago is one of the last areas on the Croatian coast (including Istria, the Kvarner Gulf, and Dalmatia) that has been subject to the general and inevitable trend of tourism. This process of tourism development in the eastern Adriatic in the second half of the twentieth century can be traced through economic, infrastructural, demographic, and other statistical indicators, but it overlooks the fact that the numerous coastal and island settlements lost their population, cultural continuity, and traditional environmental knowledge in this process, and that the tourist transition requires a different organization of time, space and interpersonal relationships. Among the inhabited islands of Šibenik, Žirje is the most distant from the mainland and is considered the least developed. These regional and insular characteristics allowed me to closely examine the transformation process of its (post)agrarian and industrial society and the creation of a tourist destination (cf. Kozorog, 2009). I am particularly interested in the “backstage” of tourism (Goffman, 2014); that is, the social and cultural processes that take place among the locals. In any case, social relations in the Šibenik archipelago must certainly also become an important framework for data analysis (cf. Baldacchino, 2015; Young, 1983).



Figure 1: Šibenik archipelago. Source: Google Maps, 2024.

Finally, the reason for my special interest in Žirje is its once very important agriculture. The Žirje Plain (*Žirajsko polje*) is the largest and most fertile area; the terra rossa soil here is by far the deepest.¹ These agricultural conditions led to the specific property relations that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century and strongly influence social relations today. A special feature of Žirje is also the long history of the presence of various armies, which were attracted by the island's remoteness and its unobstructed view of the Adriatic.

The problem of isolation

I am intrigued by the influence that the Massim archipelago had on British social anthropology (Young, 1983). In the anthropology of Charles Seligman and Bronisław Malinowski (and later E. E. Evans-Pritchard and Meyer Fortes in Africa, etc.), the study of cultures meant the study of interactive (cultural, social) islands, consequently with a protracted and structured ethnographic approach (Simonič, 2017, 2020). A broader political, economic, and scientific contextualization of the Massim archipelago or any other region was not needed and not undertaken. Globalization has since found its way into ethnology, but the idea of an island as a cultural and social isolate still has strong appeal.

¹ The plain lies in the center of the island, and they both extend from southeast to northwest. The plain is about 4 to 5 km long and a maximum of 350 m wide, whereas the island is 12 km long and an average of 1.2 km wide (Friganović, 1994: 63). It is bordered lengthwise by two ridges. On the northeastern ridge (in a sunny position) is the village of Žirje.

The island of Žirje has always been contextualized according to its position in regional or world systems (cf. Braudel, 1996; Pitt-Rivers, 1954; Wallerstein, 1980; Wolf, 1998–1999). Although it is an island, one cannot speak of isolation at any level of social life. Some may feel or seek solitude and contact with nature, and the idealized image of isolation may also bring certain economic (tourist) benefits, but all these strategies are in turn linked to political and economic centers, or civilization (Saxer, Andersson, 2019; cf. Simonič, 2017; Scott, 2009). The people of Žirje lived on the periphery of various centralized political and economic systems.

I am particularly interested in the adaptations of societies and communities in the face of profound changes in political systems, property relations, basic modes of production, and environmental conditions. In ecological anthropology, such rapid breakthroughs or paradigmatic social changes are associated with increased stress and adaptation (Moran, 2018: 3). They can be located in the temporal flow of the respective community as caesuras or transitions that bring old and new forms of everyday life—and different adaptive strategies—into consciousness. In other words, my interest in political and economic systems and ecology is always also historical (archival), never only synchronous (ethnographic). Political economies and ideologies that have shaped and utilized the (peripheral) island at different times are a reminder that (world) history is important for (local) ethnography (Schneider, Schneider, 1976).

Of course, the geographical distance of the local society from the mainland is an essential part of its “insularity.” However, an island is both a spatial and a metaphorical marker (Shell, 2014), neither of which says much about the functioning of the local community. In literary studies, insularity has been defined as the representation and construction of small worlds (Dautel, Schödel, 2016). Geographical and poetic aspects cannot determine the phenomena and anthropological interest in social relations and meanings, at least since the 1960s (Ma, 2020). This fact is also recognized in interdisciplinary island studies (Baldacchino, 2018; Hay, 2006). In this aspect, this study differs, for example, from Lopašič’s authenticistic anthropological approach to the Mediterranean islands (2001).

A (small) island is an anthropological laboratory: it allows a microanalysis of social relationships, influences, and changes and their position in a larger social and natural space. In the book *Anthropology, Islands, and the Search for Meaning in the Anthropocene* (2023), Armstrong generalizes the thinking about the island of Yap in Micronesia: “This island, like all islands, is layered deeper than it is wide” (2023: 15). These layers or sediments of time (Koselleck, 2018) are both historical and contemporary. They have emerged over the course of history, they have overlapped, strengthened, or weakened each other, and they refer to each other.² They continue to shape the framework and

² Compare this with the cultural layers in Vilko Novak’s 1958 work *Struktura slovenske ljudske kulture* (The Structure of Slovenian Folk Culture), in which he refers extensively to the Croatian ethnologist Milovan Gavizzi.

imagination of the legal, economic, religious, political, scientific, and kinship life on the island. Layers are divided by “unexpected events” that change the course of history and announce a new set of social and legal rules and values (*ibid.*). Their contemporary (individual or collectively codified) interpretations come from within and without. It is in this interplay of circumstances and traditions that modern local memories, identities, and survival strategies emerge. Identities are always related to the self and the (timely and spatially) other; they are therefore not isolated (*cf.* Barth, 1969).

For this reason, I prefer to speak of different degrees of integration or distance—or, better still, remoteness from urban, economic, informational, and administrative centers (Saxer, Andersson, 2019). A connection to the mainland has also been the maxim of the residents of Žirje in all historical political and economic structures. The island was, of course, always dependent on the navigation technology available and other infrastructure. During the twentieth century, with motorized ships, postal service, radio, telephone, and internet, the spatial remoteness and temporal delay of Žirje weakened. The locals are proud of this; they want more public boats or catamarans traveling between the island and Šibenik, and they are already globalized in terms of information.

Only in times of crisis, with systemic stresses such as military conflicts (with pirates, or with German, Italian or Yugoslav armies, etc.), times of illness (plague in the sixteenth century and COVID-19 in 2020–2021), or the choice of spiritual hermitage (in the Middle Ages and forms of modern escapism), did the perspective reverse, and isolation determined the human meaning of life on the island. Otherwise, all social endeavors were always marked by maintaining and building connections within the community, with the town of Šibenik, and with the state. Therefore, it is not possible to write about the Šibenik archipelago the way Malinowski wrote about the people of the Trobriand Islands. This does not mean that I neglect the local perspective, but that I insist on its relational and contextual interpretation.

I have arranged available data on Žirje into five historical layers with regard to political and economic structures and the consequent position of the island: Byzantine, Venetian, Austrian, Yugoslav, and Croatian. The last two layers include local oral histories and finally some personal observations. The result is an ethnological, ecological, and historical overview of a dynamic and open society.

The Byzantine layer

In the southeastern part of the island are the remains of two fortresses: Gradina on the west coast and Gusterna on the east coast. Researchers do not agree why they were built. Some believe that these were merely refuges where locals could hide in case of danger. No one is ever believed to have lived there (in contrast to the local myth of the

Illyrian queen Teuta; Iveković, 1927: 52). Zlatko Gunjača, on the other hand, believes that the fortresses of Gradina and Gusterna (also *Guštarna*, *Gušterne*) could have been built in the sixth century AD as part of Justinian's Byzantine defense system on the Adriatic against the Goths. This hypothesis is supported by the massive construction of the walls, the fact that the fortresses were built in pairs for better observation, and the presence of cisterns (Gunjača, 1994).³



Figure 2: The remains of mediaeval stone buildings. Top left and right: Gradina. Bottom left: Gusterna. Bottom right: Kućišta. Photos: Peter Simonič, 2018, 2023.

Another ruin, Kućišta, higher to the northwest, at the beginning of the plain, provides information about the medieval social integration of this remote island. The question arises as to whether it is the remains of an eleventh- to twelfth-century monastery founded after the Benedictines received the island as a gift from Croatian King Krešimir IV in 1059 (Stošić, 1941: 197). Alternatively, it could be the ruins of a residence that belonged to the monastery of Saint Lucy of Šibenik; in that case, the Benedictine monastery must have stood even higher to the northwest, at the site of today's Saint Mary's Church and cemetery (Stošić, 1941: 199). However, it is also possible that the Benedictine monastery was located somewhere on the slope of the highest peak on the island, Kapić (Iveković, 1927: 55).

Today, all these ruins are located outside the central areas of the settlement: the old village and the bays on the northern half of the island. The remains of large or even mighty stone buildings remind the locals of the island's mediaeval military and ecclesiastical role. They also offer opportunities for tourism. Gradina is often the only

³ Justinian's Code (529), which marks the beginning of his reign, is now a primary source for the study of the colonate laws in the Eastern Roman Empire (Sirks, 2024). There are no records of the existence of the colonate system on the island of Žirje at that time.

place visited by tourists—hikers, cyclists, or sailors—on a short visit to or vacation on the island. What is less well known, as two locals told me, is that after the Second World War the bodies of political and military opponents, allegedly from the Trieste area, were thrown into Gradina Cave.

The Venetian layer

Venice controlled the Adriatic from the twelfth century onward. The turning point for Dalmatia and Žirje was the year 1409, when Croatian King Ladislav sold Dalmatia to the Venetians for 100,000 ducats. Disgruntled Šibenik was militarily subjugated by the Venetians in 1412. The entire Adriatic became the “Sea of Venice.” Their rule lasted almost four hundred years, until the dissolution of the Republic of Venice in 1797. The Venetians supported the colonate system and levied high taxes on the tenants. The maritime republic (or thalassocracy), on the other hand, took very little interest in the development of the mainland, the Dalmatian archipelago, or its other overseas possessions (Bek, 1998; Internet 1; Wolff, 1997). In the eighteenth century, the Venetian attitude toward Dalmatia changed somewhat, as can be concluded from the 1778 travelogue of the Enlightenment philosopher and seeker of new economic opportunities Abbe Alberto Fortis.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Republic of Venice was confronted on the one hand with the shift of European trade to the Atlantic and on the other with the territorial ambitions of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans and the eastern Mediterranean



Figure 3: Left: Signpost to the sacred buildings (Muna Bay). Right: The church of St. Marija. Photos: Peter Simonič, 2023

(Bek, 1998). Therefore, Venice was interested not only in taxes in Dalmatia but also in its defensive position. The control over the spiritual life of the Dalmatian population was just as important as the navy, the rowers on the galleys, local defense, or the conscript groups under bandit leaders (*harambaše*). Žirje became an independent parish as early as 1460 (Stošić, 1941: 195). Its ratio of eleven priests to a thousand believers in Dalmatia was later the highest in Europe (Peričić, 1980: 55). There are many churches on Žirje today, all of which were built during the Venetian period. The ecclesiastical brotherhood of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary (*bratovščina Velike Gospe*) was founded on the island in 1484, and from 1809, for example, there are records of regular masses of the Brotherhood of the Spirit of the Purifier (*bratovščina Duha Čistilista*) and its twenty memorial services for deceased members (Stošić, 1941: 196).

During the Ottoman-Venetian war in Crete (1645–1669), the conflicts in the Balkans, in the Dalmatian hinterland, and around Šibenik also intensified (Internet 2; Soldo, 1973: 9). After 1645, Žirje was further populated with refugees from the Dalmatian and the Šibenik hinterland. In gratitude for supporting the resistance of the Catholic population and their conversion to the Venetian side, the Franciscans received the island of Žirje with all tax revenues from the Republic of Venice in 1650.⁴ Their representatives on the island more or less successfully levied a tax on agricultural land (*teratik*), a tax on building land (*livel* or *kućevina*), a twenty percent tax on all crops, olive oil, and wine (*petine*), and a tax on pasture land (*herbatik*), and they also demanded various services. The fishing warehouses on Muna Bay, which were intended for storing equipment and salted sardines or mackerel, were built in the sixteenth century but were owned by fishermen from Šibenik itself and other islands in the Šibenik archipelago, Zlarin and Prvić (Soldo, 1973: 16–46, 55; 2022).

Another legacy of the island's landscape presumably dates to the Venetian period, but now refers to its absence and as a precondition for later environmental intervention. According to the locals, the name of the island derives from the word for 'acorn' (*žir*, plural *žirje*), which refers to the composition of the former forests on the island (Stošić, 1941: 194).⁵ Today there is no black oak left on the island. What happened to this forest? Was it deforested by the Venetians for their construction projects and trade in the Mediterranean (cf. Bek, 1998)? Or was it cut down for firewood and to expand agricultural and grazing land (Tekić et al., 2015)? Or was it really burned by the "Turks" (1570–1573; Furčić, 1994: 139), as some locals say? Some old forests were certainly

⁴ The Franciscans planned to build a new monastery on the island to replace the monastery on Lake Visovac (1445–1648; in today's Krka National Park), from which they had fled. For the same reason, they had settled in Visovac after fleeing Bosnia (Soldo, 1973: 14–15). The Franciscans finally decided to build Saint Lawrence's Monastery in Šibenik.

⁵ Another etymology is based on the external essentialization of the island. It refers to Pliny's mention of the island of Sirium. According to this interpretation, the root *Zuri* is said to be of Greek origin and refers to the turn or circle that ships made around this island. Various other variants of this name also appear (Friganović, 1994a, 1994b).

cut down for lime burning (Fuerst-Bjeliš, Kale, 2018: 549–550): in Žirje there were many coastal sites for this economic activity, and the toponym *Japlenišće* (literally, ‘limekiln’) still exists. Lime was needed for the modern transition from wooden to stone house construction. The answer to deforestation is probably a combination of all these factors and not only Venetian.

Among the enduring Venetian layer of Žirje society and culture, mention must be made of viticulture, which has become especially important over the centuries. The economy was also based on the production of olive oil, as in many other Dalmatian places. By law, the Venetians determined the planting of olive trees between vineyards and the distance between them (Stulli, 1980: 52–53). Agricultural products were compulsorily collected in Šibenik and then in Venice, and only from there could they go to the international market (Stulli, 1980; Wolff, 1997). The development of Dalmatian and Žirje viticulture was part of the mercantilist organization of the Venetians, which did not change much over the centuries.

The institution of *posoba* can also be placed within the framework of balancing between local and state aspects. This was the communal self-government recognized by the Republic of Venice and at the same time the place where the assembly of the villagers met. “In the Early Modern Age use of *posoba* was documented by Venetian authorities because they recognized commoners’ councils as the best way for recruiting armed bands and whole communities for borderland military duties” (Kale, 2019: 21). The *posoba* area in Žirje is built over today, and it houses an important village institution: a health center and above it an apartment for a nurse in residence. The center of the village’s events had already moved earlier, probably in the nineteenth century, to nearby Srcela (the center or heart of the village), another crossroads of village paths and new collective memories (gatherings, dances, later the agricultural cooperative, etc.).

The Austrian layer

The occupation of Venice by Napoleon in 1797 meant the end of the maritime oligarchy and its control over Dalmatia. The administration was soon taken over by the Austrians (1797–1805), who, after a brief French period, ruled it until the First World War (1813–1918). In 1815, they founded the Kingdom of Dalmatia with its seat in Zadar, which was subordinate to Vienna. During this period of modernization, the less developed conditions of Dalmatia compared to many other parts of Austria (and Hungary) becomes clear: farming with hoes and pasturing, no industry, simple infrastructure (donkeys and boats), no education, and widespread disease (Foretić, 1969; Ravlić, 1969; Wolff, 1997).

The most important administrative intervention of the Austrian Empire in the Šibenik archipelago was the decision to make the island of Zlarin the center of most of the

surrounding islets in 1826.⁶ Zlarin was made the seat of the municipality and given a post office, captain’s office, school, and doctor. In Žirje, for example, ten miles away, a primary school was only opened in 1908, eighty years after Zlarin. The inhabitants of Zlarin were able to read and write, and they sent their children to schools outside earlier than others. The proximity of Zlarin to Šibenik (two miles) and the early strong ties to the town, the shipbuilding and trading families, and the administrative center strengthened the power of Zlarin and aroused respect and at the same time envy among the inhabitants of the other inhabited islands. In Prvić, I even heard that the inhabitants of Zlarin “once” had their own saloon on the barge that brought the islanders to Šibenik. In any case, the Austrian administration introduced micro-centralization and a hierarchy to the Šibenik islands. For all administrative matters, it was necessary to row or sail from Žirje to Zlarin.

One enduring element of the Austrian Monarchy on Žirje was certainly the location known as Straža (literally, ‘guard’), which only appears on the maps of the Third Military Survey between 1869 and 1887 (Internet 3), shortly after the foundation of Italy in 1861. Straža was also associated with military activities during the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Today, the observatory, which offers a good view of the sea and the entire island, is used by a small unit of the Croatian army.



Figure 4: Žirje in the 3rd Austrian military survey (1869–1887). Source: Mapire, 2023.

⁶ Even today, only six of the 249 small islands and islets of the Šibenik archipelago are inhabited: Murter (connected to the mainland by a drawbridge in Tisno since 1832), Krapanj, Prvić, Zlarin, Kaprije, and Žirje. On the uninhabited islands and islets, people grazed sheep, gathered wood and herbs, set up fishing camps, and the like. Some of them are leased today. The large number of Šibenik islands, their sparse population, and the neighboring Kornati islands provide an ideal setting for nautical tourism.

The Austrians also built two artillery batteries: one on the northwestern edge of the island (known as Vela Glava) and the other on the southeastern edge (known as Zvizdulje).⁷ These batteries were later also used by the Yugoslav army. Zvizdulje was last known for the artillery defense of Šibenik during the Croatian War of Independence in September 1991. After the war, there were several initiatives to establish a memorial site there.

The population of the island grew considerably from the middle of the eighteenth century until the beginning of the twentieth century, which according to Josip Ante Soldo (1973: 9) indicates a strengthening of the economic power of the peasants. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the locals became the owners of all the land in the plain (*Polje*), and some also concluded lease agreements with each other. For the citizens of Šibenik, the nobility, and the Franciscans, the collection of taxes on a remote island became an ever-increasing burden. However, the land—be it for vineyards, olive groves, gardens, or orchards—was the key to the survival of the agricultural community in Žirje. The landowners were therefore happy if they could sell and then find work in administration or trade, and the islanders were happy if they could buy. However, as the population grew and needs increased, the land was divided into smaller and smaller plots due to the egalitarian rules of inheritance (Sirovica, 1994; Soldo, 1973: 66–115; Todd, 1985). In principle, property was divided equally among all children. These social rules eventually made it difficult for individual families to make a living, which led to the economic emigration of their younger male members.

Protracted legal disputes with the Franciscans over taxes, especially their right to levy the one-fifth tax (i.e., *petine*) on the karst land outside the plain, which the locals had cultivated for centuries as pasture and for olive trees or grapevines, and where most drystone walls were built, led to an official agreement in 1876 on the final sale of the entire island (and its surrounding islets). This agreement was signed and paid by sixty-six island families. The areas outside the plain became village property, and the locals now owned the entire island in either private or communal form (Kale, 2019; Soldo, 1973).

Simultaneously with the growing administrative, travel, and scientific interest in new acquisitions on the Adriatic, Austria developed its transport infrastructure on land and water (Baskar, 2010; Šišak, 2019). The construction of the railway line from Oštarije to Split via Knin, which runs for several dozen kilometers through the Šibenik hinterland, was only started in 1912 but completed under the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (Internet 4).

Žirje has long been a producer of grapes and olives. The farmers' considerations to buy the island in the second half of the nineteenth century must have been based on these crops and sheep. Agriculture and pastoralism were their worlds, in which they

⁷ The southern edge of the island, where Zvizdulje is located, was excluded from the common village pasture for the needs of the army (Kale, 2019: 25).

invested all their knowledge, time, and money (cf. Geertz, 1963: 82). The wine boom and territorial sovereignty were soon interrupted by the Austro-Italian trade agreement (the wine clause of 1892), which encouraged Austrian (and German) merchants to buy Italian wines instead of those produced domestically. The prices for Dalmatian wines fell. A few years later, around 1894, phylloxera (an aphid that attacks the vine) destroyed viticulture, an important branch of Dalmatian foreign trade (Edinost, 1892; Lajić et al., 2001: 34). This was followed by a large emigration of (overpopulated) mainlanders and islanders from Dalmatia throughout Europe and the world. However, statistics show that the high number of residents of the island of Žirje continued until the middle of the twentieth century and even increased significantly after the phylloxera plague.⁸

Some local farmers found at least partial relief in fishing. At the end of the nineteenth century, an Italian named Conte (or Conti) from the region of Corsica came to the island, settled on Muna Bay, and promoted his fishing and lobstering techniques. This story from historical literature (Friganović, Šterc, 1994: 84; Stošić, 1941: 195) is repeated by the locals. It is unlikely that the islanders had no idea about fishing. The greater problem was poverty and the inability to buy larger nets and boats. At the time of his death, Conte owned four different fishing boats, several longlines, and lobster traps (Friganović, Šterc, 1994: 84). The people of Žirje, who were organized into fishing associations (*ribarske družine*), worked on his boats within the framework of a certain hierarchy with certain duties and a corresponding share of the catch. In any case, the Žirje fishermen also began to take over the fishing warehouses in Muna Bay at this time (Kale, 2019: 25; Soldo, 2022). The historical placement of this narrative is interesting information for understanding the essential importance and longevity of agriculture and animal husbandry on the island, as well as the late shift to marine resources and labor among the locals—although the sea near Žirje was always considered one of the richest in fisheries and corals (see Soldo, 1973).

There is no source of water on the island, the humidity is low, and droughts are frequent. Just as the plain was formed over millennia by rainwater draining from the nearby shores, a pond formed at its lowest point. People widened and deepened it, and walled it in. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, it was used for drinking water by all the villagers, sheep, and donkeys. Some of the water was carried by women with buckets on their heads or with donkeys to the houses for the household and the goats, as well as to the fields for irrigation and spraying with blue vitriol.⁹ The people collected

⁸ Approximate population development: 1298 (103 inhabitants), 1667 (183), 1742 (178), 1841 (355), 1901 (634), 1928 (750), 1951 (751), 1991 (130) (Sirovica, 1994; Soldo, 1973: 8–9; Stošić, 1941: 194). In comparison, the population of Zlarin began to shrink significantly as early as the 1920s (Korenčić, 1979), and male emigration occurred earlier and to a greater extent, so that women took over most of the island's economy, education, and culture (Simonič, 2017; Sremac, 2010). Patriarchal relationships (in the sense of “the woman on foot, the man on the donkey behind her”) are said to have existed in Žirje for a long time.

⁹ The height of the drystone wall around the pond was therefore at the height of a woman's head for easier loading (Bilan, 2021: 2).



Figure 5: Pond (*Lokva*). Photo: Peter Simonič, 2023.

the water on the east side of the pond (known as *Gornje žalo* ‘upper shore’), and the animals were allowed on the west side (known as *Donje žalo* ‘lower shore’) (Bilan, 2021: 2). Although Bilan writes that there were no digestive diseases and people on Žirje died more often from tuberculosis, which affects the malnourished (Bilan, 2021: 2, 6), on the other hand, poor hygienic conditions due to stagnant water and the simultaneous feeding of animals, frequent malaria, and the death of many children are reported.¹⁰ At the beginning of the twentieth century, the royal authorities of Zadar sent a reporter to Žirje, where there was a malaria epidemic. Based on a joint assessment by reporters from various places in Dalmatia, the reporters suggested that the state should tackle the problem by treating and eliminating the causes of the development of this disease: unclean water sources and the large number of infected mosquito species (Sirovica, 1994). It is not known to what extent the state later contributed to the construction, but before the First World War the villagers built a central village cistern above the village, and after the war they extended it further down the slope.¹¹ The development of medicine naturally also contributed to the disappearance of malaria.

The origins of the modern island landscape can also be traced back to Austrian times. In the Kingdom of Dalmatia, as elsewhere in the Mediterranean, “undemanding” Aleppo pines were systematically planted from the middle of the nineteenth century onward

¹⁰ In my opinion, the difference in interpretation stems from the fact that Bilan wrote the book in 2021 based on conversations with local women born in the twentieth century: Ljubica Konti (née Šižgorić) and Mileno Grguričin (née Šižgorić). In the middle of the twentieth century, people are said to have drunk water from the pond. Nowadays, people no longer do this. The pond and the canals connected to it are likewise no longer maintained.

¹¹ If the pond and cistern dried up, people relied on a thin layer of brackish water in a deep cave at Gradina (Bilan, 2021: 3; interlocutors).



Figure 6: One hundred years apart. Left: Muna in 1905 (anon.). Right: Muna, *Donja Banda* in 2023. Photo: Peter Simonič, 2023.

to stop soil erosion after the devastating deforestation of the oaks. Planting continued into the twentieth century, with the pine spreading by itself in some places (Tekić et al., 2015).¹² A comparison of a black-and-white photo from 1905 with a contemporary color photo illustrates the spatial changes at Muna Bay and the new “natural state” that defines modern life (cf. Fuerst-Bjeliš, Kale, 2018).

The Austrian period ends with the monument to Jerko Šižgorić (1889-1918), which stands near the old village center. It preserves the memory of a local naval officer that was involved in organizing an ethnic rebellion on Austrian ships in the Bay of Kotor at the end of the First World War and was shot after a swift verdict by an Austrian military court (Internet 6; Stošić, 1941: 195).

The Yugoslav layer

After the First World War, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia completed the Dalmatian railway. Industry developed in Šibenik. In the 1930s, this region was also affected by the global economic crisis and the harsh reaction of political parties.

As a collective remnant of the Second World War, the memory of the Slovenian priest Ferdinand Kolednik lives on in Žirje, where he has been commemorated by a memorial plaque in the village for the last few years. After the Partisans fired inaccurately at German ships in October 1943, the Germans invaded the island and gathered the entire population at Srcla, where they were threatened with execution.

¹² In Zlarin, I heard that people would boil the seeds the evening before the officially ordered pine planting campaign so that they would not germinate.

In the meantime, the few Partisans that had carried out the attack hid in Little Stupica Bay (*Mala Stupica*). According to sources and oral tradition, Kolednik knelt before a German military unit and begged them for mercy in German. He saved 630 inhabitants of Žirje, an entire village, but he ended up in a German concentration camp (Šavez boraca NOR otoka Žirja, 1952: 54–57).¹³

Despite the historical changes, agriculture, growing fruit, and pasture farming continued until the mid-twentieth century. This predominant local economic model began to disintegrate at the end of the nineteenth century, but the final collapse of agriculture on the island occurred in the mid-twentieth century, when Šibenik became an industrial center.

Life in communist Yugoslavia and its institutional consequences can already be reconstructed with the help of local interlocutors. Because they witnessed the disintegration of the traditional island society and culture during their lifetime, these narratives are always emotional.

Even after the Second World War, daily work in the vineyards and gardens, work in the olive groves (involving people of all ages and both sexes), collecting wood for cooking, and grazing sheep (women's and children's work) were part of village life. In the 1950s and 1960s, each family owned twenty sheep, which they grazed together (the animals were marked). Each family also owned a goat for the children's milk.

After the day's labor in the fields, some went fishing in the evening or at night (the work of men and widows). In the morning, they often rowed to Šibenik to sell the fish, often unsuccessfully. "*There used to be a lot of fish, but hardly anyone wanted to buy it. Today, everyone would like to eat fish, but the waters around Žirje have been decimated by industrial, tourist, and local fishing,*" said an islander. For a long time, the only way to store the catch (before canning and freezing) was salted fish, which was stacked in barrels (at Muna Bay). According to another man, salt was too expensive for his family after the Second World War, and so they poured seawater onto the terrace and then collected the salt. After the Second World War, they hoped to build a fish canning factory, but perhaps because of "*better political connections*" the factory was then built on the island of Prvić.¹⁴

Patrilocalty prevailed in the founding of new families, and the wedding ceremony re-enacted the transition of the bride to her husband's house (Furčić, 1994). Several fraternal-patrilocal families lived in manors: compound buildings with courtyards that were sometimes shared. It made sense to extend the manor houses because only three walls had to be built for each additional family house, which saved time and money by conserving stone.

¹³ After the war, Kolednik established himself internationally as a translator (Internet 5).

¹⁴ The factory in Prvić was short-lived. For the broader economic and social potential and consequences of the fish-canning industry in (northern) Dalmatia, see Kosmos et al. (2020).

The fraternal arrangement did not entail a common household; instead, each family worked their fields and looked after their animals separately. Mutual help also included the education of children. Joint labor was expected for construction work, the most important seasonal tasks (hoeing and harvesting), and pasture work, in which other villagers also helped.

The emotional framework of nostalgia encountered in people today has its roots not in the former quality and ease of subsistence, but in the diversity of social life that developed in the densely populated village; it was vibrant and alive.

When Yugoslavia wanted to catch up economically with the developed European countries, industrialization also became increasingly important in Dalmatia. After the Second World War, industry supported the development of infrastructure in transport, business, education, culture, sports, and tourism. After the 1950s, state or social enterprises in Šibenik, Split, and Zadar employed many island and mainland farmers and provided them with housing, leisure facilities, education, and so on. The need for labor on the coast also attracted people from Žirje.¹⁵ This had devastating consequences for economic and social life on Žirje, but individual families saw and seized the opportunity to escape chronic poverty and overpopulation.¹⁶ As early as 1963 or 1965, the primary school in Žirje was closed, forcing the parents of school-age children that remained to quickly move away with their families. The population of the island has thus aged statistically, which is why today it is also referred to as the “home of pensioners at sea” (Sirovica, 1994: 98). The average age of the approximately one hundred inhabitants is over sixty, and only one or two families with children of preschool age still live in Žirje.

Due to the abandonment of vineyards, orchards, gardens, and pastures in the postwar period, the island was increasingly overgrown with pines and maquis in the following decades, an ecologically reversed process compared to the previous centuries of oak deforestation, clearing, and intensive cultivation (cf. Oelschlaeger, 1991). Staying in the village in the interior of the island near the plain eventually became unnecessary

¹⁵ Some went abroad, especially to the United States. According to one local, at least part of the emigration after the Second World War was political and not only economic. It would be necessary to investigate more closely what connections and influences the emigrants and their descendants have on the island today. The property relations also suggest that social relations can be explained not only from the perspective of the locals on the island, but also from the perspective of distant, often invisible, but present actors (from Šibenik, Zagreb, New York, etc.). Today, they occasionally appear on Facebook as admirers of the island’s (family) traditions, and they come to the island more or less regularly to take care of apartments and olive groves, or for vacations. Regardless of their physical distance, they are always relatives and co-owners that have the right to shape the social and spatial processes on the island.

¹⁶ Braudel emphasized the precarious existence of most Mediterranean islands in the sixteenth century because the question was always how to survive with their own resources, land, orchards, and poultry (and other small animals; author’s note), and, if this was not possible, they looked outward (Braudel, 1972: 152). I would like to add that research on the Dalmatian islands shows that today this problem increases with the smallness of the island and its distance from the mainland and its urban centers (Lajić et al., 2001; Podgorelec, 2015), whereas Braudel noted a stronger integration of the outer islands into the international shipping flows of the time. Although the large plain was a great comparative advantage, it became a modernization trap for the islanders of Žirje.



Figure 7: Abandoned *dvori* in the old village (*Selo*). Photo: Peter Simonič, 2023.

and unpromising.¹⁷ Others began to look around the coast of the island, especially in the nearby harbor at Muna Bay. In this way they would be closer to the daily shipping connection with Šibenik, their fishing warehouses, and boats. In the 1970s and 1980s, most of the social weight and investment shifted to Muna Bay.¹⁸

As far as the relationship between the Yugoslav communist political economy and Žirje is concerned, the longer episode with the Žirje cooperative is very interesting. It was a local cell of the planned economy and at the same time an attempt at collective market participation by the villagers. It was also an extension of the island's patriarchal-egalitarian families (cf. Todd, 1985). For a time after the Second World War, the cooperative managed to slow the trend of declining population and economic activity, or so it seemed. The Žirje Fisheries Production and Processing Cooperative (*Ribarska proizvođačka i prerađivačka zadruga Žirje*) is associated with many local memories, and many see it as one of the last great community endeavors that cannot be repeated,

¹⁷ The islanders' orientation toward the plain had not only ecological and political-economic reasons (land as a basic resource in colonate agriculture), but also local defense reasons: away from the coast meant away from the pirates: "On October 9th, 1808, English pirates stole goods worth 890 lire from the house of Jakov Požarev and Kuratova" (Stošić, 1941: 199). Such a settlement model was therefore common on the Dalmatian islands.

¹⁸ The island is very exposed to the winds (Friganović, 1994a). The only news one can read about the island in winter is the temporary suspension of shipping traffic due to strong winds. A retired fisherman that lives in the village, because it is on the leeward side, told me that the name *Muna* comes from the word for 'mad' (from *munjena* 'struck by lightning'); the bay is open to the northeast, against the bora wind. The same applies to Mikavica Bay, and to Tratinska and Pečena Bays, whereas Big and Little Stupica Bays (*Vela Stupica, Mala Stupica*) on the east coast are exposed to south winds.

although it would be good if it were. At the regional office of the Croatian State Archives in Šibenik, I examined the material on fishing, agricultural, and consumer cooperatives in the Šibenik area in the twentieth century. The Žirje cooperative was founded in its final form in 1947, was fully functional for about thirty years, and was finally closed in the 1980s. As far as my interlocutors can remember, the cooperative owned three or four fishing boats in the 1960s, which were organized into fishing associations. They also traveled to Šibenik and Vodice to sell prized sweet green plums, which no longer exist today. The locals say that the climate has probably changed or that nobody took care of the plums, and so they have become overgrown. The house of the main cooperative was located at Srcela. This is where people sang, drank, played cards, talked about politics, danced, and, of course, bought agricultural equipment. In the 1980s there was a discotheque, which also attracted visitors from Šibenik and other islands. The cooperative also owned an oil mill and a shop with a restaurant on Muna Bay. Today they transport small olive harvests to the oil mill on the neighboring island of Kaprije. After the collapse of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, the cooperative dissolved and its facilities were abandoned. They were then sold to an entrepreneur from the mainland that did not fulfil his investment promises, and so they are still slowly deteriorating.

The communal agreements on the economy, space, and future of the village emphasized so far should not lead one to believe that there was complete political and economic equality. I am referring to the built-in social inequality through property and class relations at settlement, as well as local political and informal inequalities. As already mentioned, during the conquest of Dalmatia, the Venetians, in search of local allies, granted land in Žirje to some deserving orders, the inhabitants of Šibenik, and their families. Among them, the Šižgorić family, who came from Skradin on the Krka River, stands out. “In the first half of the fourteenth century (1323), the noble families



Figure 8: Sold socialist co-operative buildings. Left: In the old village, *Srcela*. Right: In the Muna bay, *Donja Banda*. Photos: Peter Simonič, 2023.

of Šibenik—Šižgorić, Jurin, and De Saracenis—acquired estates on the island, and the *coloni* became more closely associated with the town” (Friganović, 1994c: 76). “The numerous and old Šižgorić family from Šibenik owned a lot of land on Žirje since the fifteenth century, when they received property on the island from Venice as a reward for their loyalty. Over time, this property was divided among many branches of the family” (Soldo, 1973: 69). “In 1914, the Šibenik chronicler Vincenzo Miagostovich compiled a family tree of the Šižgorić family, listing more than three hundred members. Today, the descendants of the family live mainly in Žirje and Šibenik” (Hrvatska enciklopedija, 2013–2024).

Among the members of this family was a bishop of Šibenik, Juraj Šižgorić (1398–1453/54), who had a vacation residence on the island; later, a ship captain with the same surname was also rewarded with land on Žirje (Hrvatska enciklopedija, 2013–2024; Stošić, 1941: 198–199). In the agricultural study by Soldo (1973), the surname frequently appears among tax (non-)payers. One should also remember the monument to the insurgent naval officer Jerko Šižgorič. One of the members of this highly branched family is now a leaseholder (maritime concessionaire) at Big Stupica Bay (*Vela Stupica*) and is considered the most entrepreneurial and wealthiest islander. As far as inequity is concerned, I have already mentioned the preindustrial patriarchy and the varying success of farmers and families in accumulating arable land in the plain, fishing boats, and so on. Participation in various municipal bodies in Šibenik and other political and economic connections outside the island have always brought some benefit to members of the local community.

The following story from the decline of Yugoslavia can be interpreted in the context of internal political relations. The controlled or institutionalized littoralization of Žirje was represented by the division of the coastal land in the late 1970s and early 1980s. According to an agreement adopted by the village council, the authorized committee divided the land on Muna Bay (especially on the northern edge of the bay, known as *Gornja banda*), Koromašn(j)a Bay, and Tratinska/Pečena Bay, all of which were owned by the village community according to the purchase agreement of 1876. This measure was intended to stop the depopulation of the island, but instead vacation homes were soon built on most of the plots, to which apartments were later added by the descendants living on the mainland. Only a handful of these houses are permanently inhabited in winter. The stories about building houses on Muna Bay at that time revolve around transporting building materials, excavating the solid rock, and the lack of water: they are full of doubt, renunciation, perseverance, and mutual help in the village when this was still taken for granted. There are also stories about growing up on the gravel by the sea. Today, anyone that appropriates part of the coast (especially on Tratinska Bay or Big Stupica Bay) without consulting the other villagers is frowned upon, which is why the representatives of the local community go to court to defend their common property.



Figure 9: Bays of Žirje. Top left: Mikavica. Bottom left: Tratinska. Centre: Muna, *Gornja Banda*. Top right: Vela Stupica. Bottom right: Koromašnja. Photos: Peter Simonič, 2023 (except Vela Stupica, 2018).

During the Yugoslav era, a unit of the Yugoslav People's Army was stationed on the island. The social life at that time cannot be understood without the army, which had men and facilities all over the island. The locals formed many bonds with them: they arranged joint communal projects and parties, and some soldiers married women from Žirje. Due to the constant presence of the army and poor connections with Šibenik, Žirje was unable to participate in the first wave of tourism in Dalmatia, which began after the construction of the Adriatic highway in the 1960s, attracting tourists from across Europe and irrevocably changing the character of the coastal villages and towns that had been difficult to access until then, previously only accessible by donkeys and boats, and by railway in the remote hinterland.

Žirje only became a tourist destination in the late 1980s. It was the last island in this wave that spread from the mainland: with boats and passengers, electricity, internet, state and municipal development programs, EU funds, and the like. The strongest effect was in Zlarin, which published its first tourism brochure as early as 1936 (Simonič, 2017). Žirje only opened to foreigners after the withdrawal of the Yugoslav army in 1991 and the Croatian War of Independence (1991–1995).

The contemporary Croatian layer

Žirje played an important role in the defense of Šibenik against the tanks of the Yugoslav Army in September 1991. Shelling from the artillery platform in Zvizdulje was possible, it is said, because relations between the army and the population were

so good. The commander of the Yugoslav army unit on the island decided to switch to the Croatian side, to Žirje. This gave him the right to remain on the island after the war as a highly respected member of the community. He reversed the balance of power in the conflict because the Yugoslav army did not initially realize that the base on Žirje was now hostile. The artillery, which included several men from Žirje, managed to stop the tanks at the Šibenik Bridge twelve miles away, which was at the limit of what was possible given the type of artillery at their disposal (Alić, 1994; Miškić, 1994). This was the heroic era of the island. According to some locals, this is not sufficiently appreciated in Šibenik, and they would like to erect a memorial to the Croatian army at Zvizdulje, whereas others are fed up with the repetition of this history and distrust its national mythologization.

The period after the war saw the collapse of communist-era industry, shipbuilding, and shipping. The locals name several factories in Šibenik that went under during the war, denationalization, and privatization after 1991: the Lozovac aluminum factory, the Ražine aluminum factory, the iron alloy factory in Crnica, the Dane Rončević factory, the Elemes aluminum factory, the Poliplast plastic products factory, and so on.

The opening of Žirje after the war of independence and the post-Yugoslav economic crisis on the mainland have rapidly driven the tourist commercialization of land, houses, and services. The restrictions are already well known: a woman at Muna Bay told me that to release her sole ownership she had to negotiate with 250 people—that is, all the living heirs of the sixty-six families that purchased the island in the nineteenth century, many of whom live all over the world. Only so-called 1/1 plots (*jedan kroz jedan*; i.e., one owner per one plot) can be now taken seriously, purchased, or sold. Despite the restrictions, domestic and foreign purchases of houses and plots are slowly increasing (with buyers including Slovenians, Italians, and Germans).

In 2022, the majority of tourists to the island were Slovenians (40%), Croats (23%), Germans (6%), Czechs, and Austrians. In total, the island was visited by almost a thousand tourists (more than ten times the number of permanent residents), who spent around 9,500 nights on the island (Amaterska kulturna udruga Žirje, 2022: 18). Every winter is now a potential missed opportunity to expand or improve the tourism capacity at home. There is no shortage of construction work, and so laborers from Šibenik or Bosnia can work on the island almost all year round. I was invited to a celebration to mark the completion of a new apartment block, where I met almost all the locals. Two musicians from Šibenik were invited. The Croatian flag ceremonially fluttered on the roof of the new extension.

Parallel to the tourist development of Žirje, the presentation of the island's cultural heritage has also evolved. It consists of fragments of the past that are important for the internal identification of the islanders and at the same time for the tourist presentation of the local culture and past. For example, there is Saint Mary's Church, where a group of keepers of the island's religious heritage meet, thus going beyond religious motives

and socializing. The artefacts are mainly various relics donated by the locals after being acquired over many years from various Venetian masters. Under communism (1945–1991), religious life declined sharply due to depopulation and political ideology. The modern Croatian state favors relations with the Vatican. In summer, Saint Nicholas's Church at nearby Muna Bay is transformed into a venue for concerts and theater performances of the "tourist summer." The Gradina Fortress is open to tourists. There are also two large dry-stone huts, known as *Stari stan* 'old house' and *Novi stan* 'new house' (Kale, 1994). An attempt is being made to build a tourist-ecological board next to the pond. The history of viticulture, the colonate system, and the cooperative has not been documented and presented, and the remnants of a former olive press are deteriorating in the mouth of Muna Bay.

The pedigrees of several families have recently been displayed next to the remnants of the press, and data collection is still in progress. These genealogies emphasize the importance of the individual island families and their affiliation to the area, and at the same time serve as a kind of distinguishing marker of the old local families in their relationship to all newcomers at the public space of the harbor, the entry point to the island. Genealogies are also an important form of recording local history because most of the accessible records of the island's past up to the end of the twentieth century come from the outside, from various land registers, court records, and chronicles.

Today Žirje is a municipality of the town of Šibenik, as are most of the inhabited islands of the Šibenik archipelago.¹⁹ Along this line, there have been political struggles between the long-dominant HDZ party and occasional local groups supported by other parties. In the last ten years, two independent local parties have successfully participated in local elections.

One of the most important recent achievements of the island was opening a permanent grocery shop at Muna Bay in 2022. After the cooperative was dissolved, people only had a shop available in the summer; otherwise they had to travel to Šibenik, two hours away, to the market, the hospital, the municipal office, and other services.

The plain is almost overgrown with pine trees on all sides. There are only a few cultivated vineyards here and there. The last donkey left in the 1980s, and the last sheep about ten years ago. The olive trees remain tended by the families because they require less care, and their fruit is always valuable.

After the Second World War, some people began to build domestic cisterns, which later became the general standard. Today, water is delivered by boat tanker (holding 500,000 liters), which fills the old village cistern, from where the water is distributed to various (but not all) locations on the island, where people can fill their household cisterns (10,000 or 20,000 liters) by connecting them to a hydrant. In the summer

¹⁹ Today, Šepurine on the island of Prvič administratively belongs to the municipality of Vodice, whereas Murter is divided into two municipalities: Murter (with Kornati) and Tisno.

months, this amount of water lasts for ten days. Currently, the construction of a public water supply system linking Kopno, Prvić, Obonjan, Kaprije, and Žirje is underway, which will significantly ease people's worries and at the same time change the current (no longer so modest, but still more conscious) attitude toward drinking water.

Fluidity and relationality of the island of Žirje

The historical aspect and the integration into various “world systems” make it possible to read the layers of place, organization, and meaning of the island of Žirje, making it dynamic and flexible and removing the fiction of isolation. A better term to describe island life would be remoteness, and until the twentieth century also time delay and today even slowness (ageing). A distinction must be made among the spatial, metaphorical, and ethnographic or cultural isolation of the place. The culture of Žirje was originally authentic in the way the rural inhabitants and immigrants from the mainland—farmers and shepherds—adapted to the broader military, political, economic, technological, and, of course, natural environmental conditions of the island. Most of them were allowed to settle. Later, the technological, economic, political, and social conditions changed, and with them the positioning and social and environmental arrangements on the island of Žirje.

The fundamental difference between the description of the Trobriand Islands and the Šibenik archipelago is that Malinowski was not dealing with an external constraint, with an urban center that would connect and subordinate the islands: small or large *kula* ‘gifts’ and *gimwali* ‘barter’ were the result of self-initiated integration between the Trobriand people—a mechanism to avoid armed conflict between clans and tribes. This changed considerably for the Trobriand people in the twentieth century precisely because of the commercialization of bracelets and necklaces and the centralization of the Papuan state. The name *Šibenik Islands*, on the other hand, implies hierarchical administrative relations, and the modern history of island colonization, its economy, and culture. The identities of the Šibenik Islands were always more connected to Šibenik (and the world) than to each other (cf. Barth, 1969; Malinowski, 2017; Simonič, 2020). Island life and identity are the result of sociohistorical processes and negotiations with the world, not an “authentic” social capsule trapped in the sea.

I would like to draw attention to the historical changes in the manmade environments on the island: from defense (Byzantine fortresses) in the southeast of the island to agriculture and pasture in or from the center of the island, to fishing and tourism in the bays of the northern part. Each era utilized a specific niche, and these niches determine the history of the landscape and other features of Žirje's cultural heritage, identity, and imagination.

Economic value has shifted from fertile land to rocky shores. The once unpopular and worthless coast, especially in the partially sheltered bays, have become the most sought-after places where the descendants of the people of Žirje (with all those that live elsewhere), Croatian citizens or foreigners, set up a vacation home. In the meantime, the old village has largely fallen into disrepair. The desire of locals and foreigners for tourism on the coast has clashed with the common ownership of the island. Only small modifications are allowed. The complete ownership of the island by old families still makes large investments in vacation resorts and hotels impossible because they would require negotiations with many people to acquire large plots of land. The presence of the Yugoslav army also prevented adaptation to tourism for a time, although it helped modernize the island's roads and other infrastructure and integrate it into the Yugoslav state. Tourism promises similar integration today, in a different sociopolitical context and with different goals.

The hard or poor life in Žirje until the middle of the twentieth century can be explained not only by environmental conditions (climate, vegetation, and water), remoteness, or the army, but also by the long colonial and colonate extraction of wealth. In addition, the inheritance system and population growth from the eighteenth to the twentieth century led to fragmentation of agricultural property and undermined the economic basis of families. These are all social constraints that influence island life. Industrialization on the mainland and emigration abroad were devastating for the island community, but they were largely successful for many of the nuclear families. Associations of all kinds (extended family, fishing, cooperatives) did not survive but are fondly remembered. The family capital acquired elsewhere is now returning to the island in the form of new or partially restored family homes and new tourist accommodation.

The development of tourism facilities has transformed many small families into active, state-registered market entities that are promoted on influential tourism platforms on the internet. Tourism has become an important part of owners' livelihoods and a social front stage: social status on the island is measured by it. The political economy contributes to community and personal identity.

Industrialization, tourism, and the sale of property have changed the structure of society on Žirje. The family genealogies are being revived publicly today, serving as an important source of rights and status among the locals in this newly emerging multinational island community.

Acknowledgements

Peter Simonič would like to thank the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency for supporting his work in research projects and programme (J6-4610, P6-0187, BI-HR/23-24-048).

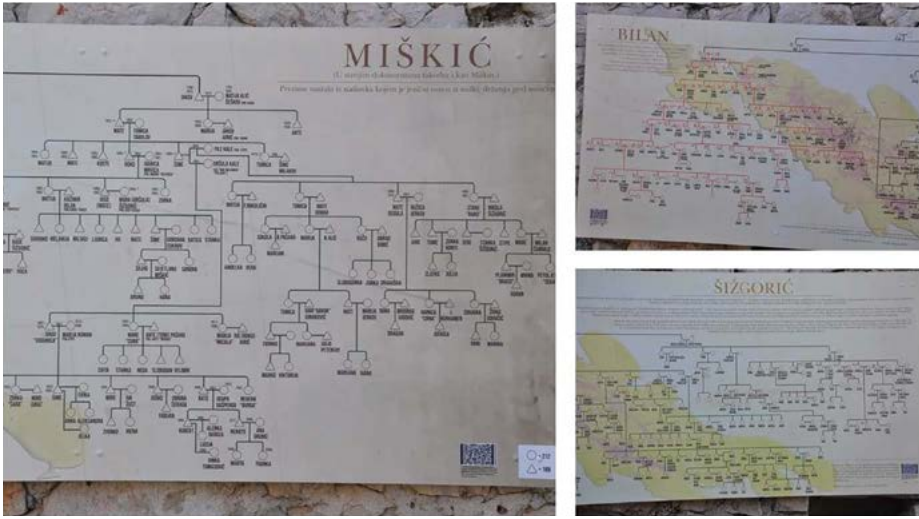


Figure 10: Panels with family genealogies on the wall of an abandoned olive mill in Muna Bay. Photos: Peter Simonič, 2023.

References

- Alić, Miroslav. 1994. Sjećanje na sedmodnevno ratovanje. In *Žirajski libar*, ed. Eduard Kale, 313–235. Žirje, Šibenik: Muzej grada Šibenika.
- Amaterska kulturna udruga Žirje. 2022. *Jadra Riječi* (Bilten br. 6). Žirje: Amaterska kulturna udruga Žirje.
- Armstrong, Justin. 2023. *Anthropology, Islands, and the Search for Meaning in the Anthropocene*. London, New York: Routledge. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003297581>.
- Baldacchino, Godfrey, ed. 2015. *Archipelago Tourism. Policies and Practicies*. London, New York: Routledge.
- Baldacchino, Godfrey, ed. 2018. *The Routledge International Handbook of Island Studies*. London, New York: Routledge.
- Barth, Fredrik. 1969. Introduction. In *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, ed. Fredrik Barth, 9–38. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Baskar, Bojan. 2010. Southbound, to the Austrian Riviera: The Habsburg Patronage of Tourism in the Eastern Adriatic. *Anthropological Notebooks* 16 (1): 9–22.
- Bek, Kristijan (Bec, Christian). 1998. *Istorija Venecije*. Beograd: Plato (XX. vek).
- Bezić, Jerko. 1981. Folklorna glasba otoka Zlarina. *Narodna umjetnost* 18 (1): 27–146.
- Bilan, Jere. 2021. *Priča o vodi*. Žirje: Amaterska kulturna udruga Žirje, Ministarstvo regionalnoga razvoja i fondova Europske unije.
- Braudel, Fernand. 1972. *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II.*, Vol. 1. New York: Harper & Brothers.
- Braudel, Fernand. 1996. *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II.*, Vol. 2. New York: Harper & Brothers.

- Dautel, Katrin and Kathrin Schödel, eds. 2016. *Insularity. Representation and Construction of Small Worlds*. Würzburg: Koningshausen & Neumann.
- Edinost. 1892. Vinska klavzula v avstrijsko-laški trgovinski pogodbi. *Edinost*, 11 June, 17 (47): 1, 3.
- Foretić, Dinko. 1969. Društvene prilike u Dalmaciji od polovice XIX. stoljeća do prvog svjetskog rat. In *Hrvatski narodni preporod u Dalmaciji i Istri*, ed. Jakša Ravlić, 46–76. Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska.
- Fortis, Abbe Alberto. 1778. *Travels into Dalmatia*. London: J. Robson.
- Friganović, Mladen Ante. 1994a. Žirje – Prilog poznavanju fiziogeografskih osebina. In *Žirajski libar*, ed. Eduard Kale, 62–72. Žirje, Šibenik: Muzej grada Šibenika.
- Friganović, Mladen Ante. 1994b. Žirje u našoj prošlosti. In *Žirajski libar*, ed. Eduard Kale, 73–75. Žirje, Šibenik: Muzej grada Šibenika.
- Friganović, Mladen Ante. 1994c. Stanovništvo Žirja. In *Žirajski libar*, ed. Eduard Kale, 76–79. Žirje, Šibenik: Muzej grada Šibenika.
- Friganović, Mladen Ante and Stjepan Šterc. 1994. Otok Žirje – Primjer depopulacije, degradacije i inovacije života na malom otoku. In *Žirajski libar*, ed. Eduard Kale, 80–84. Žirje, Šibenik: Muzej grada Šibenika.
- Fuerst-Bjeliš, Borna and Jadran Kale. 2018. Povijesna dinamika kulturnih krajolika šibenskog područja. In *Šibenik od prvog spomena. Zbornik radova s međunarodnog znanstvenog skupa 950 godina od prvog spomena Šibenika*, ed. Iva Kurelac. Šibenik: Muzej grada Šibenika.
- Furčić, Ivo. 1994. Narodno stvaralaštvo Žirja. In *Žirajski libar*, ed. Eduard Kale, 139–163. Žirje, Šibenik: Muzej grada Šibenika.
- Geertz, Clifford. 1963. *Agricultural Involution: Social Development and Economic Change in two Indonesian Village*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Goffman, Erving. 2014. *Predstavljanje sebe v vsakdanjem življenju*. Ljubljana: Studia Humanitatis.
- Gunjača, Zlatko. 1994. Kasnoantička fortifikacijska arhitektura na istočnojadranskom priobalju i otocima. In *Žirajski libar*, ed. Eduard Kale, 49–59. Žirje, Šibenik: Muzej grada Šibenika.
- Hay, Peter. 2006. The Phenomenology of Islands. *Island Studies Journal* 1 (1): 19–42.
- Hrvatska enciklopedija. 2013–2024. Šižgorić. *Hrvatska enciklopedija, mrežno izdanje*. Zagreb: Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža. <<https://www.enciklopedija.hr/clanak/sizgoric>> (accessed 23. 3. 2024).
- Internet 1. 2023. Bitka za Šibenik. *Wikipedia*. URL: https://hr.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bitka_za_%C5%A0ibenik_1378 (accessed 2.4.2023).
- Internet 2. 2023. Kandijski rat. *Wikipedia*. URL: https://hr.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kandijski_rat (accessed 3.5.2023).
- Internet 3. 2024. Habsburg Empire (1869–1887). *Third Military Survey. Mapire*. URL: <https://maps.arcaneum.com/en/map/thirdsurvey25000> (accessed 15.5.2024).
- Internet 4. 2024. Željeznička pruga Oštarije–Knin–Split. *Wikipedia*. URL: https://hr.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C5%BDeljezni%C4%8Dka_pruga_O%C5%A1tarije_%E2%80%93_Knin_%E2%80%93_Split (accessed 4.4.2024).
- Internet 5. 2023. Ferdinand Kolednik. *Wikipedia*. URL: https://sl.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ferdinand_Kolednik (accessed 3.3.2023).
- Internet 6. 2023. Jerko Šižgorić. *Wikipedia*. URL: https://hr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerko_%C5%A0i%C5%BEgori%C4%87 (accessed 5.5.2023).
- Iveković, Čiril Metod. 1927. Otok Žirje. *Starohrvatska prosvjeta* 1 (1): 45–59.

- Kale, Jadran. 1994. Sklop bunja u Samogradu na otoku Žirju. In *Žirajski libar*, ed. Eduard Kale, 221–246. Žirje, Šibenik: Muzej grada Šibenika.
- Kale, Jadran. 1995–1996. Nadnaravni karakter žene ocrtan otočnim predajama šibenskoga područja. *Etnologica Dalmatica* 4–5: 83–107.
- Kale, Jadran. 2019. Komunjско, Skupno and Seljansko: Legacy of Eastern Adriatic Commons. In *Anthropological Perspectives of Solidarity and Reciprocity*, ed. Peter Simonič, 19–29. Ljubljana: Založba Univerze v Ljubljani.
- Kale, Jadran. 2023. *Vodič kroz suhozidnu baštinu Šibensko-kninske županije*. Šibenik: Muzej Grada Šibenika.
- Korenčić, Mirko. 1979. *Naselja i stanovništvo SR Hrvatske 1857–1971*. Zagreb: Jugoslavenska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti.
- Kosmos, Iva, Tanja Petrović, and Martin Pogačar. 2020. *Zgodbe iz konzerve. Zgodovina predelave in konzerviranja rib na severovzhodnem Jadranu*. Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, ZRC SAZU.
- Koselleck, Reinhart. 2018. *Sediments of Time. On Possible Histories*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Kozorog, Miha. 2009. *Antropologija turistične destinacije v nastajanju. Prostor, festivali in lokalna identiteta na Tolminskem*. Ljubljana: Znanstvena založba Filozofske fakultete.
- Lajić, Ivan, Sonja Podgorelec, and Dragutin Babić. 2001. *Otoci. Ostati ili otići?* Zagreb: Institut za migracije i narodnosti.
- Lončar, Nina and Sanja Klempić Bogadi. 2016. Geografska obilježja Šibenskih otoka. In *Toponimija Šibenskog otočja*, ed. Vladimir Skračić, 7–39. Zadar: Sveučilište u Zadru, Centar za jadranska onomastička istraživanja.
- Lopašić, Alexander. 2001. Mediterranean Islands. A Concept. *Collegium Anthropologicum* 25 (1): 363–370.
- Malinowski, Bronislaw. 2017. *Argonavti zahodnega Pacifika*. Maribor: Založba Aristej.
- Miškić, Rato. 1994. Žirje, vjekovno neosvojivi razarač. In *Žirajski libar*, ed. Eduard Kale, 296–310. Žirje, Šibenik: Muzej grada Šibenika.
- Ma, Guoqing. 2020. Islands and the World from an Anthropological Perspective. *International Journal of Anthropology and Ethnology* 4: 12–29.
- Moran, Emilio. 2018. *Human Adaptability. An Introduction to Ecological Anthropology*. New York, Oxon: Routledge.
- Muraj, Aleksandra. 1981a. Tradicijsko odijevanje na Zlarinu, *Narodna umjetnost* 18 (1): 159–219.
- Muraj, Aleksandra. 1981b. Obrisu svakodnevnog života zlarinskih težaka. *Narodna umjetnost* 18 (1): 257–318.
- Novak, Vilko. 1958. Struktura slovenske ljudske kulture. *Razprave IV*. Ljubljana: SAZU, Razred za filološke in literarne vede.
- Oelschlaeger, Max. 1991. *The Idea of Wilderness*. Binghamton, New York: Yale University Press.
- Peričić, Šime. 1980. *Dalmacija uoči pada Mletačke republike*. Zagreb: Sveučilište u Zagrebu, Institut za hrvatsku povijest.
- Pitt-Rivers, Julian. 1954. *The People of Sierra*. New York: Criterion Books.
- Podgorelec, Sonja. 2015. Satisfaction with the quality of life on Croatian small islands. Zlarin, Kaprije, Žirje. *Island Studies Journal* 10 (1): 91–110.
- Rajković, Zorica. 1981. Običaji otoka Zlarina. *Narodna umjetnost* 18 (1): 221–252.
- Ravlić, Jakša. 1969. Predgovor. In *Hrvatski narodni preporod u Dalmaciji i Istri*, ed. Jakša Ravlić, i–ii. Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska.

- Savez boraca NOR otoka Žirja. 1952. *Historiat NOR na otoku Žirju u toku NOR i narodne revolucije 1941-1945*. Žirje: Savez boraca NOR [unpublished typed report from Edo Dodig's personal archive].
- Saxer, Martin, Ruben Andersson. 2019. The Return of Remoteness: Insecurity, Isolation and Connectivity in the New World Disorder. *Social Anthropology* 27 (2): 140–156.
- Schneider, Jane and Peter Schneider. 1976. *Culture and Political Economy in Western Sicily*. New York, San Francisco, London: Academic Press.
- Scott, James C. 2009. *The Art of Not Being Governed. An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. New Haven, London: Yale University Press.
- Shell, Marc. 2014. *Islandology. Geography, Rhetoric, Politics*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Simonič, Peter. 2017. Insularity and Political Economy of Tourism. *Etnološka tribina* 40 (47): 161–179.
- Simonič, Peter. 2020. Uporabnost etnografije Trobriandskega otočja Bronislava Malinowskega za razumevanje družbenih odnosov na Šibeniškem otočju. *Dialogi* 56 (1–2): 50–63.
- Sirks, Boudewijn. 2024. *The Colonate in the Roman Empire*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Sirovica, Drago. 1994. Neki uzroci stagnacije poljoprivrede u Žirajskom polju. In *Žirajski libar*, ed. Eduard Kale, 195–201. Žirje, Šibenik: Muzej grada Šibenika.
- Sirovica, Stjepan. 1994. Zabelješka o otoku Žirju u povijesti medicine Dalmacije povodom jedne epidemije malarije. In *Žirajski libar*, ed. Eduard Kale, 208–219. Žirje, Šibenik: Muzej grada Šibenika.
- Soldo, Josip Ante. 1973. *Agrarni odnosi na otoku Žirju (od XVII do XIX stoljeća)* (Građa za gospodarsku povijest Hrvatske). Zagreb: Jugoslavenska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti.
- Soldo, Josip Ante. 2022. Vlastnički odnosi u uvali Muni na otoku Žirju u ranom novom vijeku. *Vjesnik dalmatinskih arhiva* 3: 174–206.
- Sremac, Stjepan. 2010. *Povijest i praksa scenske primjene folklornog plesa u Hrvata. Između društvene i kulturne potrebe, politike, kulturnog i nacionalnog identiteta*. Zagreb: Institut za etnologiju i folkloristiku.
- Stošić, Krsto. 1941. *Sela šibenskoga kotara*. Šibenik: Tiskara „Kačić“.
- Stulli, Bernard. 1980. Povijest Zlarina. *Narodna umjetnost* 17 (1): 11–60.
- Šišak, Marinko. 2019. *Tu gdje istok susreće zapad. Engleski potopisci 19. stoljeća o Šibeniku i okolici*. Šibenik: Gradska knjižnica »Juraj Šižgorić«, Matica hrvatska.
- Tekić, Ivan, Borna Fuerst-Bjeliš, and Anamarija Dubrešić. 2015. The Impact of Aleppo Pine Afforestation on the Structure and Dynamics of Landscape in Mediterranean Croatia. In *The Overarching Issues of the European Space: Spatial Planning and Multiple Paths to Sustainability and Inclusive Development* (Porto: FLUP), eds. Helena Pina and Maria Felisbela Martins, 207–221. Bucharest: Milena Press.
- Todd, Emmanuel. 1985. *The Explanation of Ideology. Family Structures and Social Systems*. Oxford, New York: Blackwell.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel. 1980. *The Modern World System II. Mercantilism and the Consolidation of the European World-Economy 1600-1750*. New York [etc.]: Academic Press.
- Wolf, Eric. 1998–1999. *Evropa in ljudstva brez zgodovine*. Ljubljana: SH – Zavod za založniško dejavnost.
- Wolff, Larry. 1997. Venice and the Slavs of Dalmatia. The Drama of the Adriatic Empire in the Venetian Enlightenment. *Slavic Review* 56 (3): 428–455.
- Young, Michael. 1983. The Massim: An Introduction. *The Journal of Pacific History* 18 (1): 3–10.

Otok Žirje: spodbijanje trditev o izolaciji

V članku je predstavljena analiza otoka Žirje na Hrvaškem s poudarkom na njegovem družbeno-ekonomskem razvoju od 16. stoletja do danes. Preučene so ostaline ali plasti gospodarskih in političnih sistemov (Bizanc, Benetke, Avstrija, Jugoslavija, Hrvaška), ki so vplivale na otok in njegovo prebivalstvo ter so zato pomembne tudi pri pisanju sodobne etnografije. Avtor se opira na mnoge predhodne raziskave, opravljene na šibeniškem otočju, pri čemer poudarja, da so sicer dokumentirale raznovrstne vidike Žirja, vendar so spregledale sodobne družbene in ekološke teme ter historične primerjave, s katerimi je mogoče slediti družbenim prilagoditvam v daljšem časovnem obdobju.

Besedilo opisuje prehod od obrambnih struktur in kmetijskih praks k osredinjenosti na ribištvo, industrijo in turizem. Gospodarska vrednost se je v drugi polovici 20. stoletja z rodovitne zemlje sredi otoka preselila na kamniti priobalni pas, kjer nastajajo počitniška bivališča. Avtorja je zanimalo, kako so ti premiki povezani z lokalnimi političnimi, pravnimi, verskimi in sorodstvenimi strukturami. S prostorsko in časovno relacijsko analizo je lahko ovrgel poenostavljene ideje, ki prikazujejo otoke kot izolirane entitete, in namesto tega pokazal, kako so njihove družbe in identitete oblikovali širši družbeni (svetovni) sistemi in procesi.

Pomemben del identitete otoka Žirja predstavlja bogata kmetijska zgodovina, povezana z Žirskim poljem. Odlične kmetijske razmere so oblikovale tudi otoška lastninska razmerja v poznem 19. stoletju, ki še danes vplivajo na druga družbena razmerja. Poleg tega ima otok dolgo zgodovino vojaške navzočnosti zaradi odmaknjene lege in neoviranega pogleda na Jadransko morje.

Na stiske, s katerimi so se spoprijemali otočani do sredine 20. stoletja, so vplivale okoljske razmere, kolonialno in kolonatsko izkoriščanje, rast prebivalstva in pravila nasledstva, ki so povzročila razdrobitev kmetijskih zemljišč. Industrializacija in izseljevanje po tem sta razkrojila otoško skupnost, vendar je veliko družin uspelo drugod, na celini ali v tujini, njihov kapital se je vrnil v obliki obnovljenih domov in novih turističnih namestitev. Turizem je jedrne družine spremenil v tržne subjekte, ki imajo pomembno vlogo v lokalnem gospodarstvu in si tako krepijo družbeni položaj. Struktura skupnosti na otoku se s prihodom tujih obiskovalcev in lastnikov spreminja, javno poudarjene družinske genealogije pa postajajo pomembne kot znamenja starih prostorskih in političnih pravic v rastočem večnacionalnem okolju.

Connected by Sea, Isolated by Water: Water and Water Supply Infrastructure on Two Croatian Islands

Ana Perinić Lewis

Institute for Migration Research, Croatia

ana.perinic.lewis@imin.hr

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2425-1061>

This article presents ethnographic research on the lack of water infrastructure on two Croatian islands – Žirje and Hvar. Both islands are examples of various forms of isolation that have persisted throughout history and have even been reinforced by absent or neglected water infrastructure. The author critically examines the social, cultural, and economic role of water as a factor of survival or disappearance, along with its political and demographic consequences.

• **Keywords:** water infrastructure, water supply, isolation, Žirje, Hvar

V članku avtorica predstavlja etnografsko raziskavo o pomanjkljivi vodni infrastrukturi na dveh hrvaških otokih – Žirje in Hvar, pri katerih gre za različni obliki izolacije, ki se je ohranila skozi zgodovino in jo je celo okrepila odsotna ali zanemarjena vodna infrastruktura. Avtorica kritično preučuje družbeno, kulturno in ekonomsko vlogo vode kot dejavnika preživetja ali izginjanja ter njene politične in demografske posledice.

• **Ključne besede:** vodna infrastruktura, oskrba z vodo, izolacija, Žirje, Hvar

Introduction

The sea and water are two dynamic elements that define islands and islandness. I make a terminological distinction between the two because it is the first lesson learned on an island. Islanders would never refer to the sea as water. The difference is not purely linguistic; it also refers to the meaning. To an islander, the sea as a substance is not seawater. To an islander, the sea is just the sea (Božanić, 2023: 283). It is important in creating the island's identity and its economy. The sea embodies the duality of isolation and connectedness. On the one hand, it is a medium that separates islands physically, and on the other a communication medium that under the circumstances of developed navigation connects islands among themselves or with the mainland (Faričić, Čuka, 2020). However, one cannot drink the sea, nor water plants with it, nor give it to livestock to drink. Water on islands has been collected, stored, and used economically because it is a “valuable liquid without which human settlements cannot exist, nor any serious survival” (Pavličić, 2010). The abundance of the sea and the scarcity of fresh water are defining characteristics of islands.

When mentioning the words *island* and *water*, my first association is the story “Voda” (Water) by the writer and islander Vladimir Nazor. The plot begins in the summer, during a great drought in the village of Velo Selo on Brač, where three months without rain have caused a shortage of drinking water. The drought affected nature and human



behavior due to the constant threat of thirst and hunger. The village leaders negotiate with the authorities to be provided with water, transported by a water tanker from Pula. The author is a master at describing the collective feeling of thirst and desire for water in a scene in which early in the morning all the villagers are standing by the sea with various pots and waiting for the savior ship. However, the drought crisis does not create solidarity on the island, but instead friction, greed, and disunity, with all the illnesses of a small island community coming to the surface. Nazor wrote the story in 1923. Today in the Adriatic there are still twenty inhabited islands without water that are supplied by water carriers, just like in Nazor's time.

To carry out research on isolation and insularization, I selected islands that are archetypal spaces and landscapes for acquiring the imagery of isolation and remoteness. In this article, I view the various forms of isolation not as states, but rather as processes, historical and contemporary, in which spaces and communities lose their vital constitutive determinants (people, infrastructure, services, social networks, and the future) as preconditions for successful functioning (Dzenovska, 2020). Isolation and insularity are analyzed as a multidimensional and changing phenomenon, and as a cultural understanding of change in relation to the notions of belonging (Drazin, 2018). Furthermore, some communities and individuals view isolation as a loss, neglect, and marginalization, whereas others see in it an opportunity and gain (Dzenovska et al., 2023). The research explores the experience of isolation in island communities, examining their perceptions of both objective and subjective determinants of isolation. It explores how these communities navigate the risks and vulnerabilities tied to their dependence on external factors caused by infrastructure limitations. In addition, the analysis highlights the resilience and independence displayed by islanders through their strategies for coping with the challenges of isolation and remoteness. The research on water on islands contributes to a broader understanding of the way fragile isolate communities adapt their lives to limited resources, significant seasonal pressure, and specific ecological challenges. Securing drinking water for all residents and tourists is becoming increasingly challenging due to the islands' geographical remoteness, infrastructure problems, and limited resources. Living without infrastructure or with deteriorated island infrastructure affects the everyday life of islanders and often limits their economic development. This article presents ethnographic research on absent and neglected water infrastructure on two Croatian islands, Žirje and Hvar, to illuminate the changing experience of development in isolated communities.

Both islands possess a rich maritime history and a significant geopolitical and geostrategic position within Adriatic maritime routes (Bratanić, 2020). Historically, maritime commerce, maritime transport, fishing, and boatbuilding connected these islands with the Mediterranean and the wider world. Today, however, maritime links are more focused on regional centers on the mainland, and the seaside and nautical tourism have become the backbone of islands' economy. Both selected islands are

examples of multiple insularity and many layers of longstanding spatial and historical isolations. Infrastructural limits further aggravate everyday life and work due to a need for greater individual investments and efforts, while at the same time affecting further demographic emptying, particularly of rural settlements in the islands' countryside.

Žirje was selected as an example of multiple insularity and a small island that served as a military base for fifty years under coastal self-government (from the city of Šibenik). It is categorized as the least developed island or a depopulated island with extremely low economic dynamics, without water infrastructure, and to which water is provided by water-carrier ships. The field research on Žirje was conducted in 2023 by Lana Peternel and me, and in 2024 it was carried out by Filip Škiljan.

Hvar is a large, inhabited, and well-developed island, and an example of a divided island whose eastern part functions as an island within the island (Perinić Lewis, 2017). This is the case due to further strengthening of insularization and isolation as a consequence of a lack of water infrastructure. Field research on Hvar has been carried out for many years (since 2006), and infrastructure has emerged as a relevant research topic in analyses of various forms of isolation based on examples of islands and island communities. In addition to the islanders, I also interviewed employees of the Hvar water supply company Hvarski Vodovod and the firemen that deliver water with water trucks. Based on ethnographic data, this analysis explores the role of the state, as perceived by the islanders, in the construction, reconstruction, and maintenance of water supply infrastructure on the islands. It also examines the coping strategies employed by the islanders, who have lived without stable sources of drinking water. Ethnographic research on water on islands, where water has always been a rare and precious resource, critically examines the social, cultural, and economic role of water as a factor of survival or disappearance, along with all the political and demographic consequences. The old saying “Put your finger in the sea and you are connected to the whole world” has held true for centuries of living by and from the sea on Croatian islands. However, if you want to dip your finger into fresh drinking water on some Croatian islands, you will experience a different side of island life—one tied to living with limited resources, remoteness, isolation, and frequent neglect from the mainland and the state.

Islands, isolation, infrastructure

Islands, both geographically and metaphorically, often symbolize isolation due to their separation from the mainland or larger social contexts. Islands hold a special and privileged position as isolated places, being surrounded by water (Ronström, 2021: 280). Isolation “is the product of specific materializations of complex spatial and temporal interrelations in a particular (island) locale, rendered possible by the engirdling and entangling sea” (Baldacchino, Starc, 2021: 6). The physical barrier of the sea configures



a specific experience of territory. Insularity is a geographic circumstance that initially determined development on islands and a “bounded sensibility” that shapes the sense of uniqueness and distinction (Hay, 2013: 217). The key feature of an island is the island’s edge, coastline, or rim as the essential factor that constitutes islandness. Islanders tend to be more in contact with and aware of boundaries than most other people (Hay, 2006: 21). Islandness is connected to a strong identification with the sense of place. It is “a complex concept that describes the overall island existence in conditions of long-term insularity” (Starc, 2020: 5), “a metaphysical sensation that derives from the heightened experience that accompanies physical isolation” (Conkling, 2007: 200). Islandness includes emotions resulting from insulation and isolation (Vannini, 2011: 250). On near islands that are close to the mainland of their country, islandness should also be understood as “a political stance toward the mainland state” and “a complex construction that incorporates the feeling of inhabiting an island along with experiences of exclusion, marginalization, diminished capacity, and the struggle to influence state decisions” (Bustos, Roman, 2019: 100). The sea connects the island through transportation routes and migratory pathways for all living things, both human and nonhuman (Foley et al., 2023). Philip Hayward (2012) proposes the concept of the ‘aquapelago’ to capture the holistic nature of the connections between land and sea in island realms. For island communities, reliable and permanent traffic connections play a crucial role in shaping overall life and are essential for overcoming geographical isolation and reducing socioeconomic disparities.

On the other hand, drinking water on islands is a precious resource, and lack of a water supply network exacerbates the feeling of remoteness and isolation from the mainland. Water on islands has always been valuable, and water supply has been a challenge for centuries. In areas with limited water sources such as islands, the water supply relied heavily on groundwater and rainwater harvesting, with extensive use of wells and cisterns (Voudouris et al., 2019). Infrastructure often suggests ideals of inclusivity, integration, and a vision of a comprehensive whole. Building infrastructure is regarded as an effective way to promote the “public good” because it is both inclusive and essential for the functioning of society (Di Nunzio, 2018). Ethnographies of infrastructure and citizenship highlight how local forms of connection, disconnection, and belonging shape people’s experiences. Infrastructure is not just about physical networks but also involves social and emotional ties that influence how individuals relate to each other and to the state (Anand, 2011; Von Snitzler, 2013; Chelcea, Pulay, 2015). If the state is theorized through roads, the islands are inhabited because of and due to accessible drinking water (Carse, Kneas, 2019). Obtaining water relies on a vast and complex network of physical infrastructure, coupled with a bureaucratic system that extends from local entities to national authorities and international governing bodies. The regulation and management of water resources also involve legal systems, oversight agencies, and judicial bodies to regulate water use and address violations or conflicts (Orlove, Caton, 2010: 402). Analyzing hydrosocial relationships thus implies paying

attention to the myriad relationships that link water to its human users (Ballestero, 2019; Greek, 2021). Water infrastructure mediates the interactions between people and social institutions, as well as between people and the biophysical environment, constantly producing and transforming sociotechnical relations (Wells et al., 2021: 5–6). It has become technologies that countries deploy to pursue progress and modernity, while also differentiating and sometimes disenfranchising populations (Appel et al., 2018). It has the potential to connect islanders to both running water and the state. However, because the infrastructure develops through delays, disruptions, and stagnations, this connection is never fully realized—neither the physical-material connection nor the connection to a supportive state (Greek, 2021: 100). Infrastructure is “characterized by multiple temporalities, open futures, and the constant presence of decay and ruination” (Gupta, 2018: 62). According to Ashley Carse and David Kneas (2019), unbuilt and unfinished infrastructures can become the axes of social worlds and sites where temporalities are knotted and reworked in unpredictable ways. Temporal loops (prolonged presence, suspended presence, and nostalgic future) are evident in the lives of people that lived with unbuilt, unfinished, or damaged water infrastructure because infrastructural limitations symbolize either promises of a better future or remnants of unrealized visions (Löfgren, 2004; Gupta et al., 2018).

The Croatian islands are fragmented, located on the periphery of the Croatian coastal region, and often positioned at the margins of modern social and economic networks (Faričić, Čuka, 2020: 57). They have always been under the dominion of the mainland, so that decisions on the islands’ development have always been made on the mainland (Kordej-De Villa, Starc, 2020). Article 52 of the Croatian constitution states that the islands are entitled to special protection.¹ The role of the state is critical for islands to “remain places of life, not isolation” (Weiss, 2010).

Most ferry lines connect the Croatian islands to the nearest coastal urban centers, whereas there are few direct links between the islands themselves. In research on the quality of life conducted on small Croatian islands (in the Šibenik and Zadar archipelagos), one of the main disadvantages highlighted by the respondents was poor transport connections (Babić et al., 2004; Podgorelec et al., 2015; Mikulandra, Rajhvajn Bulat, 2022). Larger islands closer to the coast tend to effectively address their traffic issues, benefiting from better access and more frequent transportation services. In contrast, small islands often struggle to secure high-quality traffic connections, leading to challenges of isolation that significantly hinder access to services. This limited connectivity not only affects the daily lives of island residents but also diminishes the potential for tourism and economic development (Mišura et al., 2020).

¹ “The sea, seashore, islands, waters, air space, mineral resources, and other natural resources, as well as land, forests, flora and fauna, other components of the natural environment, real estate, and items of particular cultural, historical, economic, or ecological significance that are specified by law to be of interest to the Republic of Croatia shall enjoy its special protection” (Article 52, Constitution of the Republic of Croatia; Internet 1).

Water on Croatian islands: Rare and precious

Water on islands has always been valuable, and supplying water has been a challenge for centuries. From prehistory, rain in pools and water from rare natural springs and wells were the only sources of drinking water on islands. Rare island areas that had springs and watercourses were places of early settlements or colonization, such as the Greek colony of Pharos at what is now Stari Grad on Hvar (Taburšković, Mićunović, 2022). Another example is Jelsa on Hvar, which has three springs of drinking water (Libor, Garmica, and Vir), which were the main reason for the settlement of Jelsa and neighboring places. Even today these springs are part of the island water supply system. In addition, three streams still flow through Jelsa, of which the best known is Slatina Creek (Internet 2). According to local legends, it has its source beneath the altar of the main church in Jelsa and makes its way through the town's main square, from which it runs into the sea. On Žirje, the fortresses of Gradina and Gustjerna (Gušterna/Gušterne) from late antiquity on the southwestern part of the island that served as control points for the intersection of Adriatic naval routes are located near water (Podrug et al., 2016). There is an underground lake in Gradina Cave, 35 meters deep within the walls of a fort from late antiquity, from which drinking water was drawn until the mid-twentieth century (Jalžić, 1994: 46). Within the fort at Gustjerna, there are the remains of a cistern that used to collect rainwater, which is also how the site got its name (*gustjerna* means 'cistern'; Iveković, 1927; Gunjača, 1986; Podrug et al., 2016). The third site of water accumulation on the southern side of the island is in a natural cave eleven meters deep on Draževica Hill (Kale, 2009: 251). The islanders are well acquainted all the rare natural springs, wells, still waters, pools, pits, and caves where water could be found on their islands. This is visible in island toponyms on the two islands explored in this article. Among them, there are always hydronyms for land on islands that refer to the water on Hvar (Hraste, 1956; Vujnović, 2022) and Žirje (Marasović-Alujević, Grgurić, 2011; Skračić, Šprljan, 2018). On Žirje, the area called *Lokva* (or *Loka*) in the fertile Žirje Plain played a crucial role in sustaining life and the local economy. Until the early twentieth century, it served as a source of drinking water for the islanders, as well as for watering livestock, washing clothes, extinguishing fires, and irrigating the surrounding fields (Faričić, Magaš, 2004).

Collecting surface water, harvesting rainwater, and using this water efficiently is one of the essential skills for island life. On Croatian islands, most of the time the water supply has been based on collecting and storing rainwater in small private or large public cisterns. Rainwater was collected from the roofs of houses in private cisterns, and communal village wells collected rainwater from huge stones and slabs especially laid for that purpose. On many islands, especially small and remote ones, these systems are still in use (Faričić, Čuka, 2020: 70). This water was often used for watering livestock, irrigation, and agricultural production. The island cooperatives needed greater

amounts of water for extracting essential oil from rosemary and lavender through a steam distillation process (Petrić, Štambuk, 2007).

In the past, on Žirje and many other Croatian islands, tasks such as bringing water from natural pools, wells, or cisterns to the house and washing laundry were traditionally women's work. Monuments depicting women carrying buckets of water (e.g., in the village of Brusje on Hvar in front of communal village cistern) or a laundress with buckets of washed laundry on her head (in the town of Krk on the island of Krk, and in Preko on Ugljan) still testify to this today. Moreover, half of my interviewees, especially older persons, living on islands without modern water infrastructure still collect rainwater from roofs into separate tanks and mostly use it for watering gardens.

Water has many other monuments on the island, which testify to its significance. The first examples of water transport on Croatian islands can be traced to the Roman period. Thus, in the Brijuni archipelago and on Pag there are preserved remnants of Roman aqueducts (Vitasović, 2006; Ilakovac, 2008). From later periods there are remnants of water systems and large wells that were built in the island settlements under the rule of Venice and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Public taps from the early twentieth century are still in use, such as the one near the main city gate in the town of Hvar or the fountain on the main square in Jelsa, erected in 1934 to mark the construction of the first public water supply system that provided drinking water to Jelsa from nearby Vir Spring. The fight for water had a dark side as well. Valuable pools and swamps became sources of malaria in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. In Jelsa on Hvar, the Soline Swamp was drained due to health issues in the nineteenth century. Today, a park has been built in its place. On Žirje, a malaria epidemic broke out in 1902 (Sirovica, 1994). The water supply used to cause deaths, as well. One such tragedy is evidenced on the commemorative plaque at the entrance to anchialine Živa Voda Cave in Kozja Bay on the southern coast of Hvar. Here, two men lost their lives while pumping water from a spring in the cave on August 9th, 1972.²

The map on the website of Hrvatske Vode, a legal entity in charge of water management in Croatia, displays water supply zones (Internet 3). Croatia is mostly covered by the public water supply system, and pink marks are areas of “individual water supply,” or areas that are not connected to a pipeline. Such zones are mostly mountain regions and islands.

A large majority of Croatian islands do not have their own natural sources of drinking water. Due to the porous, permeable rock, there are almost no permanent surface watercourses. The most favorable water supply conditions are found on Cres and Lošinj, which use water from Lake Vrana (a freshwater lake on Cres, a unique hydrogeological karst phenomenon), and, along with Vis, these are the only islands

² The plaque reads: “In this cave the young lives of Miro Jerković (born March 17th, 1941) and Duško Rudan (born December 26th, 1938) were tragically lost. This memorial plaque was erected by Jozo Rudan in honor of his brother and cousin.”



that fully meet their water needs from their own resources (Vlahović, Pekaš, 2002). Some large islands (Krk, Rab, Pag, Dugi Otok, and Korčula) have somewhat better water resources that can supply most of the island settlements. Where available, rare local wells and springs provide a portion of the water supply, although these sources are often insufficient to meet total demand. Only nine islands have their own water resources eligible for use in water supply (Vlahović, Pekaš, 2002). The Croatian islands are supplied with water in three different ways. Some larger islands have their own water sources and tailored infrastructure for transporting water around the island. Islands closer to the mainland, and larger and more populated islands (Krk, Cres, and Lošinj) receive water from the mainland water supply via underwater pipelines. These pipelines transport water from mainland reservoirs and rivers to the islands. The outermost islands and those not connected to the mainland by pipelines are supplied with drinking water by water carriers. In rare cases, desalination plants convert seawater into potable water as part of the water supply infrastructure or strategy for the remote islands or for islands with high water demand during summer season (Susak, Lastovo, Krapanj, Mljet, Vis, Biševo, Palagruža, Šolta, Mljet, and Korčula). There are ecological issues related to desalination, especially on islands, because it is an energy-intensive process that requires substantial amounts of electricity (Runko Luttenberger, 2017). Some of the largest Croatian islands, such as Cres, Pag, Hvar, Korčula, and Mljet, are among the 11% of the islands where the water supply system is partially regulated (Dadić et al., 2008). However, the small islands and those far from the mainland have not yet been connected, and their water supply consists of private reservoirs or tanks. They collect rainwater, and drinking water is brought to the islands by a water carrier and/or water trucks (Faričić, Čuka, 2020: 71). About 4,860 households on twenty islands are not connected to the public water supply network (Internet 4). In addition, water supply is a significant issue in the summer, particularly during the tourist season, when demand increases because the number of consumers multiplies several times.

Delivery of water according to the law and regulations

The delivery of water to island settlements that are not connected to the public water supply system is regulated by the *Island Act*.³ Over twenty years, it has changed twice, and along with these changes bylaws for water supply regulation also changed three times.

³ The *Island Act* (NN 116/18, 73/20, 70/21) includes a provision known as Island Rights (part 7, sections 1, 2, and 3, Articles 29 to 34), which guarantees subsidized prices for maritime and road transportation of water, as well as subsidized water costs if the island is supplied by water conveyance. Islanders hold an island identity card (*otočna iskaznica*), a special card provided to residents of the islands to facilitate access to specific benefits and discounts. This card acknowledges the challenges and higher costs associated with island living. It is issued to individuals that have permanent residence on one of Croatia's islands (*Zakon o otocima*, 2018; Internet 5).

Each change always included a decrease in the quantity of subsidized water per household. Currently, the delivery of water to islands is regulated by Article 33 of the *Islands Act*, under which islanders are granted water supply for household consumption amounting to up to 85 m³ per year at a price that is equal to the price of water paid by the same category of users in the place from which water is delivered. Local self-government units maintain records of the islanders and regularly provide this information to the public water supply service provider. The Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds cofinances the costs of transport by water carriers and water tankers. The amount of water is quite abstract when described this way. Islanders know the quantities very well, and they use a *cisterna* (tank) as a measure unit. The capacity of one *cisterna* is 10 m³, which means that they have the right to eight and a half *cisterne* per household member a year. Water carrier ships delivering water to smaller islands have a capacity of 500,000 liters. When referring to the quantity of water that they need, island residents use the expression *vagon* (wagon), an old measurement unit for mass, where 1 *vagon* equals 10,000 kilograms.

Žirje: Carrying water to the island

Soon two long canvas hoses were lying on the path stretching from the shore across a small lane in front of our home to the well of an isolated house on Glava. Resembling two dead serpents, they waited for the water that would run through them. (Nazor, 2005 [1923]: 38)

Žirje is a small island (15 km²) with 105 permanent residents under the administrative direction of the city of Šibenik. It is also the most remote island in the Šibenik archipelago. The largest settlement is the village of Žirje (also known as *Selo*, literally ‘village’), located in the island’s hinterland bordering the Žirje Plain (*Žirjansko polje*). Other coves and bays on the island are only seasonally inhabited, with a few isolated cases of permanent settlement, such as in Mikavica and Koromašnja.

Žirje was affected by extreme socioeconomic transformation that changed the traditional way of life on the island. The primary industries on the island are agriculture, pasturing, and fishing. Žirje’s fields were completely covered with vineyards by the end of the nineteenth century. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the crisis in viticulture, the appearance of phylloxera, and the economic downturn of that era contributed to intense depopulation. A demographic exodus began then and continued after the Second World War. The island was a military base in the second half of the twentieth century, resulting in its isolation from the mainland and a ban on tourist visits. Tourism on Žirje has mainly remained undeveloped compared to the other islands in the Croatian Adriatic. Due to strategic military interests of the former Yugoslavia and an important role in the

defense of Croatia in the Croatian Homeland War in 1991, it became a unique island in the Croatian archipelago. Due to this, its historical, social, and cultural development differs from the development of other Croatian islands. For more on the history of the island, see the article by Peter Simonič (2024) in this issue of the journal.

The construction of modern, basic island infrastructure began under the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, with the establishment of a port or ship dock. Yugoslavia expanded this further, primarily by constructing military facilities, with less attention given to infrastructure for the local population. Independent Croatia has also faced the challenge of building a water supply system and providing electrification. Under all the previous regimes, and under Croatia as well, the islanders of Žirje did not have a satisfactory level of infrastructure that would allow them a quality of life like that on the mainland.

There was never a water supply system on Žirje, as there was on the mainland or on other large Croatian islands. Traditionally, the islanders have relied on harvesting rainwater. Most homes on Žirje are equipped with cisterns that collect and store rainwater. Water is supplied from the coast by ship, a water carrier, which fills the communal village cistern, from which the water is distributed through fire hoses to private water tanks or is distributed directly to the residents. There are four such ships in Croatia, with an average age of over sixty years, which often fail to meet the island's drinking water requirements on time and in sufficient quantity. One is under the jurisdiction of the Croatian Navy, and the other three are privately owned and are over sixty years old. The water carrier that brings water to Žirje is *Kapetan Mrs*, built in 1953, with a water tank capacity of 480 m³, a speed of 8.5 knots, and 221 kW of engine power (Novak, Dejhalla, 2020: 71). The volume of each shipment to Žirje is 480 m³. Water from the mainland is supplied when needed, and during summer months water is delivered two to four times per month. In the summer months, this amount is often insufficient, especially for the islanders involved in tourism.

There are also hydrants that, according to islanders, are not equally distributed on the island. The hydrant network is completely lacking in bays or small ports. The islanders maintain their household cisterns by themselves and take care of the water quality in them. They are highly committed to this because both their own health and the health of the tourists staying in the apartments and houses that they rent out depend on it. They also carefully plan and ensure an adequate water supply, particularly during the summer months, often considering the capacity of the water carrier and the allocated amount of subsidized water for the island's households. However, they remain concerned about the upkeep of infrastructure managed by local and regional authorities, such as the wear and contamination of fire hoses used to deliver water to private cisterns.

That water system is in a terrible state, the pipes are in awful condition, everything needs to be replaced. [...] More or less, everyone has a water tank. That large ship arrives, fills the hydrants, water reservoir, and



Figure 1 and 2. Fire hoses used to deliver drinking water to a household on the island of Žirje. Photos: Ana Perinić Lewis, May 2024.

then the water is distributed to the tanks by fire hoses [...] but hoses are old, nobody repairs them, nobody takes care of that. And, it sometimes remains outside, and in the rain all kinds of things happen. Everyone, more or less, cleans the tanks. (Kate, Žirje, around 30)

The hoses are torn, of zero quality, and the water runs like Niagara Falls. There, they stay for a whole year, and now when I need to collect water, it will run through these stinky hoses that frogs, mice, and who knows what animals have snuck into. Such water will flow into my water tank. It's a disaster. (Jadranka, Žirje, around 70)

The islanders rent apartments or rooms to Croatian and foreign guests during the summer season, and a limited or disabled water supply means a threat to their existence. They also face a challenge because the electricity grid covers only part of the island's settlement. Electricity limitations affect the quality of life and equal opportunities. Because water from tanks is drawn using pumps, any electricity shortage also results in a lack of water. They note that it is challenging to explain such infrastructure deficiencies to tourists from countries where these issues do not exist.

When there's no electricity, there's no water either because we rely on a pump. It's manageable for us, but when you have guests in the house,

how do you explain that there's no electricity and, consequently, no water? You might explain it to them, but it's hard for them to understand because they don't live in this kind of environment. [...] So, you end up carrying water in buckets to each apartment floor. And when they use it up, they just leave the empty buckets, and then you have to fill them up again. (Mare, Žirje, around 70)

The islanders stated that their isolation has protected the island from mass tourism. They note that their guests are different from those in other coastal and island destinations. They believe that tourists visiting Žirje seek peace and isolation and respect the island's natural environment and way of life, yet they also feel entitled to the conveniences of modern civilization. Nautical tourism has developed, and most of the interviewees refer to the restaurants in the bays and the concessionaires managing the anchorages for ships and yachts as “*money factories*.” Nevertheless, the islanders' main complaints focus on the excessive number of boats and the behavior of some sailors, prompting them to call for increased controls and regulations during the busy summer months. All the interviewees noted that Žirje offers a Robinson Crusoe–style tourism experience, attracting tourists that come specifically to seek peace and isolation. In the English-language literature on special interest tourism, this concept and term have not been theoretically developed. The closest related terms are ecotourism, sustainable tourism, and adventure tourism. The official website of the Croatian National Tourist Board (CNTB) promotes Robinson Crusoe–style tourism as “a uniquely Croatian experience for modern adventurers” and defines it as follows: “Named after the protagonist of Daniel Defoe's adventure novel, Robinson Crusoe–style tourism involves staying in properties primarily powered by renewable energy, without running water, electricity, gas, internet, or shops.” Destinations for this specialized type of tourism are islands, mountains, and forests, “where pristine wilderness still has the final say” (Internet 6).

This type of tourist promotion views isolation and remoteness as an advantage, as “the lure of the island” (Baldacchino, 2012). On the other hand, in last ten years newspaper articles and reports referring to Žirje as the “Croatian Cuba” (Internet 7, 8) have appeared in the media. All the interviewees opposed this representation of their island, emphasizing that it undermines the promotion of Žirje as a tourist destination, which should be based on the island's natural beauty and a unique holiday experience distinct from the typical summer tourist options.

Despite the interviewees viewing Robinson Crusoe–style tourism as sustainable and beneficial for the island and islanders, their explanations reveal that this form of tourism is largely a result of the island's lack of, underdeveloped, or incomplete infrastructure. They emphasize that with multiple infrastructure limitations (problems with water supply, electricity, internet, one shop, no hotels, and only four restaurants) Žirje can develop only this type of special-interest tourism (Alviž et al., 2017). They perceive

places on the mainland with well-developed infrastructure as “civilized.” Provision of infrastructure is closely linked with the sense of shaping modern society and progressing toward the future. The availability of running water has come to symbolize what defines civilization itself (Larkin, 2013: 332).

People that love rural environments come here, while those that want a more developed lifestyle go to civilized places, like hotels in Primošten, Vodice, and so on. So, here you get the complete relaxation and peace that you can't find anywhere else but in small, remote places like islands that haven't been fully developed yet. (Jadranka, Žirje, around 70)

In the summer, the island becomes crowded with people, but the winter months bring various experiences of isolation. From the interview, I highlight statements about the experience of isolation on Žirje when bad weather causes power outages on the island and interrupts traffic connections with the mainland.

In 2017, there was a hurricane-force bora wind, everything froze. There was ice; not a single plant [...] all the leaves were frozen. The wind chill factor was -19, -20 °C, and a reporter came four days later when the ship arrived, asking, “How did the island function for four days in complete isolation?” Those of us that were mobile would go help the elderly by lighting a fire, heating their homes, and preparing food. I cooked beans and pasta. I always have five kilos of beans at home; she has some too [pointing to a neighbor and laughing]. Between the two of us, what we have in our houses could literally feed the island for fifteen days. (Mare, Žirje, around 70)

In crisis and extreme isolation, when the beloved sea turns hostile, the best qualities of the small island community emerge—not the challenges depicted in Nazor’s novella, but instead its strengths: connectivity, solidarity, and effective coping strategies that arise within the constraints they face, a community in which members look out for each other. Research on life satisfaction on small islands confirms that it is greatly affected by the extent of preserved social values and the closeness of personal relationships, which include the level of acceptance within the local community, solidarity, and cooperation (Podgorelec et al., 2015).

For islanders, running water remains a long-desired amenity. They have not given up on their wish for a water supply system to be established on their island someday. The Šibenik–Knin County Water Supply Plan (Internet 9) mentions a plan to build the first phase of underwater pipelines from the mainland (at Srma) to the islands of Prvić, Obonjan, Kaprije, and Žirje. In this water supply project, Žirje is the last island

scheduled to be connected to the public water supply system during the “third phase of construction,” which involves building a submarine pipeline between the islands of Kaprije and Žirje. To date, only 553 meters of the planned 21,000 meters of the submarine pipeline have been completed. In most interviews, the interviewees express skepticism that the final phase of the project, which includes Žirje, will be completed in the near future. This skepticism arises from past experiences with failed promises and instances of state carelessness.

Two islands in one: Hvar as a divided island

Hvar is an example of a large island whose water supply network has been partially solved. Hvar is the longest Croatian island (68 km), and it is the fourth-largest island in the Adriatic. The island is administratively divided into two towns (Hvar and Stari Grad) and two municipalities (Jelsa and Sućuraj). It is one of the best-known Croatian islands and is referred to as “Croatia’s premier island,” marked by an outstanding geographical position, a favorable climate, and well-developed tourism (Bradbury, 2011). The town of Hvar is one of the leading Croatian destinations for high-end tourism (Gržinić, Bobanović, 2020).

Hvar is a divided island. In addition to the island boundary, it has an entire network of complex intra-island boundaries. It consists of two micro-regions, whereby the eastern part of the island has always been isolated and distant from the western, more populated, and better developed part of the island. This is a result of the island’s complex history of settlement, migration, changes in rulers and systems, and real and imagined isolation. Today, around 80% of Hvar’s population lives in the western settlements, and the remaining 20% in the eastern part. Throughout history, natural factors⁴ have strongly influenced the location and types of settlements, and limited communication between villages. Initially, the eastern part of the island was isolated as a municipal property in which permanent settlement was forbidden and restricted throughout the Middle Ages. The statute of the medieval commune of Hvar (1331) regulated the oldest administrative island boundary and referred to the eastern part of the island with the historical-administrative name *Plame* (i.e., *confines de Plame*). This rocky and less fertile area of the island was not private property, but land used by shepherds and for cattle breeding and logging (Kovačić, 1998). There were no permanent settlements until the fifteenth century. Afterward, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it was earmarked for colonial experiments of the Venetian Republic, which organized systematic and planned immigration of new settlers, refugees after the

⁴ The morphology forms a natural boundary between the eastern and western parts of island. The eastern karst area is shaped like a long blade that narrows toward Sućuraj, accounting for 54% of the island’s length and about 42% of its area (Roglić, 1977).

Venetian-Turkish wars. These people were designated to serve in the Venetian navy and defend the Serenissima. These new islanders were further divided and detached from the domicile population by privileges that prevented connection and integration. The Paštrović Privileges (*Privilegije Paštrovića*), which they enjoyed until the arrival of the French authorities in 1804, gave them land to cultivate and exempted them from paying customs and tributes, serving on Venetian galleys in wartime, paying certain taxes, and performing public works. The privileges were withdrawn if the new residents refused military service or married the indigenous people (Čolak, 1959). This was a cause of division and conflicts between groups of old and new residents. The acquired privileges were defended by the newcomers as their privileged isolation, as is clear from many archive records of meetings, elections of representatives, and issues contested before the authorities of the commune of Hvar (Čolak, 1962). During the Second World War, this part of the island was an important point for the organization of defense of Hvar and Central Dalmatia due to its position near the mainland.

Infrastructure built during the Second World War (roads, electricity, the water supply system, and the ferry port in Sućuraj) connected the two regions, but they were also one of the reasons contributing to easier and faster emigration from the island, and immigration to the western part of the island, which offered better living opportunities. The need for employees in tourism was a pull factor for entire families moving out, building houses, and living primarily in the island's urban centers, such as Hvar, Stari Grad, and Jelsa. This part of the island has always been governed by the island's municipal centers (in Yugoslavia the town of Hvar, and today Jelsa and Sućuraj). The depopulated space detached and divided from various centers of power on the island, and oriented toward a different mainland center than the rest of the island (the western part is oriented toward the city of Split, and the eastern part toward Makarska), was additionally neglected in terms of construction and maintenance of infrastructure. The length of the island and the distance between the town of Hvar and Sućuraj (77 km), along with centuries of weak or no inter-island connectivity, have influenced the creation of a marginal area in the east and the focus of the eastern population on the mainland (Perinić Lewis, 2017; Perinić Lewis, Rudan, 2020).

The settlements on the eastern side of the island (Poljica, Zastrazišće, Gdinj, Bogomolje, and Selca kod Bogomolja), as well as their inlets, are not connected to the water supply network like other Hvar settlements. All of this contributes to the emigration of residents from already depopulated settlements, leading to further fragmentation and insularization of the island's spaces and communities. The Hvarski Vodovod website provides a detailed description and map of Hvar's water supply system. In the text where the construction of the water supply network on the eastern part of the island is announced, there is a prevalence of deadpan constructions in the present tense, and particularly in the future perfect, which is used for future actions that are mentioned in the present—for example, “The construction of the water supply system for the eastern

part of Hvar is envisioned from Poljice to Bogomolje, including their inhabited inlets. It is expected that the projects will be realized under EU funding” (Internet 10).

For islanders on Hvar, water infrastructure is a “promissory note” (Appel et al., 2018). Because of a lack of investment, they are experiencing a suspended presence (Carse, Kneas, 2019: 18–20), “a temporary zone between the start of projects and their completion” (Gupta, 2018: 70).

At this point I can call my explorations of Hvar longitudinal due to the time span. Since my first field visits in 2006, I have been observing matters regarding the water supply together with the island residents. Thus, I have also been waiting for the water supply for eighteen years. I present a set of testimonials from my Hvar field research at different time points, which best illustrates the waiting for the future, the slowness in realizing the infrastructure project, and decades of living and working hardships among the islanders, who have been navigating their ways under unfulfilled promises.



Figure 3. Firemen from Jelsa Volunteer Fire Department (DVD Jelsa) delivering drinking water by water truck to a household in a bay on the eastern part of Hvar. Photo: Lana Peternel, September 2024.

You see that we don't have water, you see what the road from Jelsa to Sućuraj looks like, while Hvar has so much tourism! (Margarita, Gdinj, around 60; 2008 interview)

For years they have provided us with drinking water delivered by water trucks, in limited quantities, even though they know that it is a serious problem for all those with small wells and large families, as well as those working in tourism. (Nikola, Zastrazišće, around 50; 2018 interview)

There is still no water supply system, Poljica, Zastrazišće, Bogomolje, but soon there will be [...] in ten years [laughter]. (Jure, Bogomolje, 70; 2023 interview)

When we will get it, if we will get it, I don't know. [...] I've been hearing that we will get it since I was born, but it is what it is. Now I'm old, and still no water [laughter]. (Dino, Bogomolje, around 50; 2023 interview)



Figure 4. Filling a private water tank with delivered drinking water in a bay on the eastern part of Hvar. Photo: Lana Peternel, September 2024.

Apart from no water supply system, other infrastructure such as the roads and electrical system hinder everyday living due to deterioration and lack of repair. In this part of the island there is also the problem of weak electricity or lack of an electricity network in inlets, where most rental in tourism facilities are found. Because water is transported by water trucks, the water supply also depends on the D116 road, built in 1960 and not repaired since. Today, the road on the eastern part of the island is in extremely poor condition, without protective barriers in many parts, and with many sudden curves and poor signage.

Most inlets can be reached by gravel roads. Unimproved roads and unpaved driveways create problems and affect the transport vehicles because they wear out and damage the tires, which increases the costs of water transport. Firemen have pointed out additional problems when, due to increased needs, in the summer they transport water for the whole day in two shifts. In the last few years, there has been a lack of seasonal workforce for water transport.

Yearly, we drive up to 100,000 kilometers with all the vehicles. [...] When I tell some people that when we order truck tires here, they cannot believe it that we change the first tires after 6,000 kilometers. In the summer we drive from 5:30 in the morning until nine in the evening [...] it's totally exhausting for the people and vehicles... The average is fifteen cisterne a day. We have to drive to cover the demands, which have already started to be enormous. (Fireman)



Coping strategies: How to (mis)use islands' privileges

Island economies are small-scale economies based on a “mixed” economic model of the island household and diversification of economic activities (Montana, 1994). To cope with scant resources, islanders have historically diversified their livelihoods, striving for the optimal use of what is available. Islanders living close to unfinished and neglected infrastructure get by in various ways. Their testimonies evoke an image of an islander-bricoleur,⁵ who gets by under challenging situations, imposed limitations, and crises by employing the skills of improvisation and adaptation. Those engaged in tourism activities enlarge water tanks on their own, and they install solar panels in places with no electricity to provide for their guests. Subsidized water is intended for household consumption and for islanders that reside in these places, and not for commercial entities on the island, which are charged a higher price for water. At that price, tourism would not be profitable. Consequently, several family members often register their residence on the island, or several friends get together to do so, despite not permanently residing there, to obtain water at subsidized prices. In doing so, they find that, in relation to other islanders that have access to the water supply, they are in fact second-class citizens. When the municipal infrastructure is lacking, local communities take the initiative and create their own innovative solutions to address infrastructure challenges (Wells et al., 2021). When institutions ignore the special circumstances of the island, this always opens the door to informal, non-institutional activities and organization in a “gray zone.”

Mum is registered down in the inlet, whereas father is up in the village. If they were both registered in the village, nobody would deliver water to the inlet and vice versa [...] we would be left without water. (Ante, Gdinj, 50)

I shouldn't be provided with this water, in the first place. I need to sort of freeload, with someone's eyes closed, then I have a friend that is registered as a resident here, whereas he actually lives in the town of XX, and then I am given a couple of cisterne on his behalf. I need to engage in fraud, which is not at all [...] honorable, but otherwise how? (Dinko, Bogomolje, 50)

⁵ Lévi-Strauss's concept of *bricolage* was first articulated in *The Savage Mind* (1962) as metaphor for how cultures employ existing symbols and structures to create new meanings. Subsequently, *bricolage* has become a term to describe various processes of structured improvisation. The *bricoleur* is described as “someone who works with their hands,” utilizing “odds and ends” because there are no other resources available (Johnson, 2012).

The islanders are disappointed with the state and do not believe that it will take care of their needs and build the infrastructure. They only believe in what they provide or build themselves. Instead of reliance on the state and large-scale capital investment in infrastructure, they engage in self-construction, alone or by mobilizing the community in a joint building project (Silver, 2014).

When you depend on the state to provide something for you, I laugh at it ... You can't expect anything from the state; everything is set up so that an ordinary man can't get anything. (Dinko, Bogomolje, 50)

The state—nothing. We built the road to the inlet by ourselves. It was completely built by private funds in 1986, there were sixteen of us, and each weekend we paid for the road construction work by ourselves. We were having a harder time then than when we were building the new house, when my children were small, going to school, and it was them for whom money needed to be provided. (Mare, Gdinj, 70)

The lack of water supply infrastructure is due to the state, which is the only stakeholder that can carry out such large and expensive projects. As a rule, this project has been postponed in favor of projects implemented in the more developed part of Hvar. A water supply creates dependence on the municipality of Jelsa or Sućuraj and state subsidies, ensuring that the residents will remain and work in tourism, under much harder circumstances than in other island settlements.

The state is criticized by the employees at Hvarski Vodovod that organize water supply. They emphasize the neglect and isolation of the eastern part of the island. They think that the state must not impose limits on the quantity of water or condition that subsidized water can be used only for the residential needs because people should be allowed to pursue tourism in the same way and under the same conditions as in other island settlements. They do not allow the state to interfere with local decisions on the approval of requested amounts of water, but demand that it build infrastructure so that they will not live as “second-class citizens.”

You have to give him water to water the garden, flowers, and not just to drink, to stay alive. What use if he stays alive in some wilderness over there? He needs to have a way to rent his apartment, to provide a guest with enough, to be economically grounded to be able to live there. If not, then we won't live there. That's what I was always saying at Hrvatske Vode, the ministry, fighting against that amount of water that they purportedly limit. They demanded that we lower the price, “You need to control that.” I say: “Let that go. We control that. All right, goodbye!” (Ivo, Jelsa, around 60)



Criticism of mistreatment by state authorities is common in island communities. This reflects an asymmetrical relationship and marginalization. Islanders are generally forced to accept decisions made by central authorities regarding their peripheral status, with these decisions often shaped by traditional views that perceive islands as inherently different from the expectations of mainland societies (Bustos, Román, 2019: 99–100).

Uniform national developmental policies do not impact all regions equally, especially in sensitive areas like islands. Despite the measures implemented over the past quarter of a century, island development planning remains fragmented and unintegrated.

Conclusion

Those folks are also gaunt, dark, and stringy, like their vines. The fluids in them have thickened; I would say that all their veins have become stringent and twisted in knots, to try to keep at least those tiny droplets of juice that remained in them. (Nazor, 2005 [1923]: 9–10)

Technological innovations such as telemedicine, energy solutions such as solar panels and wind turbines, desalination plants, and broadband internet services have reduced the “handicap” associated with island living in the twenty-first century (Baldacchino, Starc, 2021: 4), but it is paradoxical how infrastructure for basic living conditions on some islands still has not been established.

Islanders living on small islands and parts of large islands without water supply infrastructure experience varying degrees of remoteness, peripherality, and isolation. Surrounded by the sea, they order and wait for drinking water that travels by water-carrier ships or tanker trucks. In procuring drinking water, they are highly dependent on the reliability of transportation, weather conditions affecting deliveries by ship, the state of maintenance of other infrastructure through which the drinking water must “travel” to reach their homes (including roads, electricity networks, and the people delivering it), and the water’s quality. In addition, the willingness of the state to subsidize these water deliveries plays a critical role in their access to this vital resource. Securing a sufficient quantity of drinking water essential for daily life and tourism, islanders must consider the logistics of water storage: *vagoni*, *cisterne*, cubic meters, and estimates: how much will be needed daily, weekly, and yearly. This often leads to concerns about whether there will be enough water to meet the demands of both locals and tourists visiting the island. In addition to waiting for water deliveries, islanders also find themselves waiting for the fulfilment of promises concerning the construction of water supply infrastructure, listening to and observing projects, and visions of a water future. They are aware that most citizens on the mainland easily meet such needs with the simple act of turning on a tap.

Both islands in this article are examples of various forms of isolation, detachment, and boundedness that have lasted throughout history, and are nowadays continued or even reinforced by absent or neglected infrastructure. Both islands are doubly peripheral: not only at the margins of local interest, but also neglected by regional and state authorities. Due to its small size and remoteness, Žirje, as an outlying and strategically important island, has been more isolated than other islands in the Šibenik archipelago throughout all its history. Although Žirje shares a similar fate as other small Croatian islands, the specific historical and contemporary experiences of isolation among the residents of Žirje are unique. Due to its inaccessibility and lack of basic infrastructure, it is perceived as an isolated place. Today, Žirje is on the brink of either depopulation or a shift from permanent to temporary habitation.

Hvar is a divided island, whose inter-island boundaries and divisions create islands within the island. The eastern part of Hvar is a space of otherness in terms of geography, history, and identity: it is eternally remote and at the margin of interest of island authorities and administrations, subject to the postponement or restriction of development in favor of the more populated and economically more developed part of the island. Constant investment in island centers with strongly developed tourism further aggravates the feeling of neglect and isolation. Depopulation and ageing of the population cause visible voids evidenced in empty hamlets or entire villages. Due to additional infrastructure scarcities, emptiness is difficult to activate as an opportunity. More often, it represents loss and disappearance (Dzenovska et al., 2023).

Žirje and the settlements on the eastern part of Hvar have never had a water supply system, nor access to drinking water in the same way that the mainland or the islands with a water supply infrastructure. In the case of Hvar, residents of the eastern part observe their neighbors—fellow islanders that, unlike them, have been using this infrastructure for decades. Water is delivered to the residents of both islands by water carriers and water trucks, which they depend on. Their lives and jobs are different from those of the mainland population, and those of most other islanders. In addition to other challenges of island life, they are additionally concerned about the quality and maintenance of their own water tanks and testing the quality of drinking water—which, if neglected, may jeopardize their health, and the health of tourists, whom their existence depends on. On Žirje, in addition to feeling isolated and neglected by the city of Šibenik, and in the eastern part of Hvar, feeling overlooked by the municipality and regional administration, the islanders also feel helpless and abandoned by the state. Water infrastructure and the availability of drinking water highlight the hidden practices of interactions between the state and islanders. The state introduces processes that lead to prolonged and exhausting isolation on the islands. For my interviewees, the state played a key role in positioning Žirje and the eastern part of Hvar on the social, demographic, and economic periphery. Islanders express their views on laws and rules, seeing the state as hypocritical, discriminatory, and inefficient. Older islanders express an emotional

relationship with the state, and they are tired of prolonged waiting, hoping, and requesting. For islanders, the state lacks credibility and does not seem to prioritize its citizens, especially those in remote areas (Peternel, Perinić Lewis, 2025).

The lack of water supply infrastructure, poorly maintained roads, absent or weak power supply, and inadequate coverage and strength of internet connections are strong material testimony to multifold neglect and negligence. Similarities emerge in the employment of various coping strategies by the islanders, often implying avoidance of rules and laws, which in all their prescriptiveness and inflexibility do not take into account the specific characteristics of the islands and their communities. Due to the lack of water as a basic infrastructure, resource, and human right, and forced to depend on the local and state aid in its provision, they feel like second-class citizens. They believe that they can enjoy better living and working conditions only through their own individual or collective (but nevertheless island community-based) engagement, actions, and organization. Older people are particularly aware that they will not live long enough to witness the realization of promises that the infrastructure will be built. Based on the unfulfilled promises, unrealized projects, development plans, and strategies, they believe that—like many times before in the island's history—they will remain paradigmatic examples of isolates.

Acknowledgements

The research is part of the project Isolated People and Communities in Slovenia and Croatia—ISOLATION, a Slovenian–Croatian bilateral project of the Slovenian Research Agency (ARRS) and the Croatian Science Foundation (HRZZ), IPS-2022-02-3741; 2022–2025 (principal investigators: Lana Peternel, Institute for Social Research in Zagreb, Croatia, and Dan Podjed, ZRC SAZU, Institute of Slovenian Ethnology, Slovenia).

References

- Alviž, Kristina, Bruna Bušac, and Jelena Šišara. 2017. Tourism on Šibenik's Islands: Alternative to Mass Tourism. In *Proceedings 3rd International Scientific and Professional Conference "Challenges of Today: Sustainable Coastal and Maritime Tourism"*, eds. Branko Cavrić, Tomislav Rimac, and Dragan Zlatović, 77–85. Šibenik: Veleučilište u Šibeniku.
- Anand, Nikhil. 2011. Pressure: The PoliTechnics of Water Supply in Mumbai. *Cultural Anthropology* 26 (4): 542–564. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1360.2011.01111.x>.
- Appel, Hannah, Nikhil Anand, and Akhil Gupta. 2018. Introduction. Temporality, Politics, and the Promise of Infrastructure. In *The Promise of Infrastructure*, eds. Nikhil Anand, Akhil Gupta, and Hannah Appel, 1–38. Durham, London: Duke University Press.
- Babić, Dragutin, Ivan Lajić, and Sonja Podgorelec. 2004. *Otoci dviju generacija*. Zagreb: Institut za migracije i narodnosti.

- Baldacchino, Godfrey. 2012. The Lure of the Island: A Spatial Analysis of Power Relations. *Journal of Marine and Island Cultures* 1 (2): 55–62. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.imic.2012.11.003>.
- Baldacchino, Godfrey and Nenad Starc. 2021. The Virtues of Insularity: Pondering a New Chapter in the Historical Geography of Islands. *Geography Compass* e12596. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12596>.
- Ballesterio, Andrea. 2019. The Anthropology of Water. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 48: 405–421. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-102218-011428>.
- Božanić, Joško. 2023. Paradoksalnost fenomena insularnosti – iskustvo UNESCO-ova Geoparka Viški arhipelag. In *Otočnost u suvremenom društvenom kontekstu – pogled u budućnost: zbornik radova*, eds. Miljenko Jurković and Jana Vukić, 261–284. FF Open Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17234/9789533791968>.
- Bradbury, Paul. 2011. *Hvar – An Insider’s Guide to Croatia’s Premier Island*. GuideGecko (eBook).
- Bratanić, Mateo. 2020. *Pomorstvo Dalmacije u 19. stoljeću: otok Hvar u tranziciji*. Zadar, Stari Grad: Sveučilište u Zadru, Muzej Staroga Grada.
- Bustos, Beatriz and Álvaro Román. 2019. A Sea Uprooted: Islandness and Political Identity on Chiloé Island, Chile. *Island Studies Journal* 14 (2): 97–114.
- Carse, Ashley and David Kneas. 2019. Unbuilt and Unfinished. The Temporalities of Infrastructure. *Environment and Society* 10 (1): 9–28. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3167/ares.2019.100102>.
- Chelcea, Liviu and Gergő Pulay. 2015. Networked Infrastructures and the ‘Local’: Flows and Connectivity in a Postsocialist City. *City: Analysis of Urban Trends, Culture, Theory, Policy, Action* 19 (2–3): 344–355. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13604813.2015.1019231>.
- Čolak, Nikola. 1959. Iz života iseljenika Makarske i njenog Primorja na srednje dalmatinskom otočju u 17. i 18. stoljeću. *Prilozi povijesti otoka Hvara* 1 (1): 87–121.
- Čolak, Nikola. 1962. Borba novih stanovnika na srednje dalmatinskom otočju u 17. i 18. stoljeću za očuvanje stečenih privilegija. *Prilozi povijesti otoka Hvara* 2 (1): 52–89.
- Conkling, Philip. 2007. On Islanders and Islandness. *Geographical Review* 97 (2): 191–201.
- Dadić, Željko, Magdalena Ujević, Edo Lovrić, Ivan Mijatović, and Dragutin Gereš. 2008. Improvement of Water Supply on Inhabited Croatian Islands, Workshop on the Protection of Groundwater as a Source of Drinking Water in Karst Areas, Malinska, Island Krk, Croatia. 14–15 April.
- Di Nunzio, Marco. 2018. Anthropology of Infrastructure. *LSE Cities, Governing Infrastructure Interfaces-Research Note* 1: 1–4.
- Drazin, Adam. 2018. The Fitness of Persons in the Landscape: Isolation, Belonging and Emergent Subjects in Rural Ireland. *Social Anthropologist* 26 (4): 447–602. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1469-8676.12521>.
- Dzenovska, Dace. 2020. Emptiness: Capitalism without people in the Latvian countryside. *American Ethnologist* 47 (1): 10–26. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12867>.
- Dzenovska, Dace, Volodymyr Artiukh, and Dominic Martin 2023. Between Loss and Opportunity. *Focaal* 96: 1–15. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3167/fcl.2023.960101>.
- Faričić, Josip and Damir Magaš. 2004. Contemporary Socio-Geographic Issues of Small Croatian Islands – the Example of Žirje Island, Croatia. *Geoadria* 9 (2): 125–158. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15291/geoadria.133>.
- Faričić, Josip and Anica Čuka. 2020. The Croatian Islands: An Introduction. In *The Notion of Near Islands. The Croatian Archipelago*, ed. Nenad Starc, 55–88. Landham, Boulder, New York, London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.



- Foley, Aideen, Laurie Brinklow, Jack Corbett, Ilan Kelman, Carola Klock, Stefano Moncada, Michelle Mycoo, Patrick Nunn, Jonathan Pugh, Stacy-Ann Robinson, Verena Tandrayen-Ragoobur, and Rory Walshe. 2023. Understanding “Islandness”. *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 113 (8): 1800–1817. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/24694452.2023.2193249>.
- Greek, Martin. 2021. The Connective and Disconnective Capacities of Water Infrastructure: The Making of Chile’s Largest Off-grid Solar Power Irrigation System. *kritisk etnografi – Swedish Journal of Anthropology* 4 (2): 99–112. DOI: <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-463869>.
- Gržinić, Jasmina and Mieta Bobanović. 2020. Luksuzni turizam i stavovi dionika – odabrani obalni gradovi Hrvatske. *Oeconomica Jadertina* 10 (1): 56–73.
- Gunjača, Zlatko. 1986. Kasnoantička fortiifikacijska arhitektura na istočnojadranskom priobalju i otocima. *Materijali* (Savez arheoloških društava Jugoslavije) 22: 124–136. [Reprinted in: Kale, J. and Ž. Krnčević, 1994: 49–59.]
- Gupta, Akhil. 2018. The Future in Ruins: Thoughts on the Temporalities of Infrastructure. In: *The Promise of Infrastructure*, eds. Nikhil Anand, Akhil Gupta, and Hannah Appel, 62–79. Durham, London: Duke University Press.
- Hay, Pete. 2006. A Phenomenology of Islands. *Island Studies Journal* 1 (1): 19–42.
- Hay, Pete. 2013. What the Sea Portends: A Reconsideration of Contested Island Tropes. *Island Studies Journal* 8 (2): 209–232.
- Hayward, Philip. 2012. Aquapelagos and Aquapelagic Assemblages. *Shima* 6 (1): 1–11.
- Hraste, Mate. 1956. Antroponimija i toponimija općine hvarske. *Hrvatski dijalektološki zbornik* 1, JAZU: 331–385.
- Ilakovac, Boris. 2008. Roman aqueducts on the Island of Pag. *Vjesnik Arheološkog muzeja u Zagrebu* 41 (1): 129–166.
- Iveković, Ćiril Metod. 1927. Otok Žirje, Starohrvatska prosvjeta, N. s. I/1-2, Zagreb – Knin, 45–59. [Reprint in: *Žirajski libar* 1, ed. Eduard Kale, 27–33. Šibenik: Nakladno povjerenstvo Žirajskog libra, Muzej grada Šibenika.]
- Jalžić, Branko. 1994. Jama Gradina na otoku Žirju. In *Žirajski libar* 1, ed. Eduard Kale, 44–47. Šibenik: Nakladno povjerenstvo Žirajskog libra, Muzej grada Šibenika.
- Johnson, Christopher. 2012. Bricoleur and Bricolage: From Metaphor to Universal Concept. *Paragraph* 35 (3): 355–372.
- Kale, Jadran. 2009. Posmrtni život otočnog pašnjaka. In *Destinacije čežnje, lokacije samoće. Uvidi u kulturu i razvojne mogućnosti hrvatskih otoka*, eds. Ines Prica and Željka Jelavić, 235–268. Zagreb: Institut za etnologiju i folkloristiku, Hrvatsko etnološko društvo.
- Kordej-De Villa, Željka and Nenad Starc. 2020. On the Rim of Croatia and Croatian Development Policies. In *The Notion of Near Islands. The Croatian Archipelago*, ed. Nenad Starc, 215–248. Landham, Boulder, New York, London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Kovačić, Joško. 1998. Župa Zastržišće na Hvaru. *Služba Božja: liturgijsko-pastoralna revija* 38 (2): 159–184.
- Larkin, Brian. 2013. The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42: 327–343.
- Löfgren, Orvar. 2004. Concrete Transnationalism? Bridge Building in the New Economy. *Focaal – European Journal of Anthropology* 43: 59–75.
- Marasović-Alujević, Marina and Ines Grgurinović. 2011. Etimologijsko istraživanje romanskih obalnih toponima Žirja. *Zbornik radova Filozofskog fakulteta u Splitu* 4 (4): 17–27.
- Mikulandra, Katarina and Linda Rajhvajn Bulat. 2022. Kvaliteta života mladih s otoka Prvića. *Socijalna ekologija* 31 (3): 297–333. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17234/SocEkol.31.3.3>.

- Mišura, Antonija, David Sopta, and Ana Perić-Hadžić. 2020. Impact of Traffic Connectivity on Island Development. *Naše more: znanstveni časopis za more i pomorstvo* 67 (1): 69–77. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17818/NM/2020/1.10>.
- Montana, Mladen. 1994. Ekonomija malih razmjera u otočnom razvoju. *Društvena istraživanja: časopis za opća društvena pitanja* 3 (4–5): 531–546.
- Nazor, Vladimir. 2005 [1923]. *Voda i druge pripovijetke*. Zagreb: ABC naklada.
- Novak, Josip and Roko Dejhalla. 2020. Preliminary Design of a Drinking-water Carrier for Water Supply to the Croatian Islands. *Pomorski zbornik – Journal of Maritime and Transportation Sciences* 3 (Special Edition): 63–75.
- Orlove, Ben and Steven C. Caton. 2010. Water Sustainability: Anthropological Approaches and Prospects. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 39 (1): 401–415. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.012809.105045>.
- Pavličić, Pavao. 2010. More nije voda. *Vijenac* 430–431. URL: <https://www.matica.hr/vijenac/430/more-nije-voda-1685>.
- Perinić Lewis, Ana. 2017. *Otoci otoka Hvara. Pluralizam lokalnih otočnih identifikacija*. Zagreb: Hrvatska sveučilišna naklada.
- Perinić Lewis, Ana and Pavao Rudan. 2020. Two Islands in One: The Island of Hvar. In *The Notion of Near Islands. The Croatian Archipelago*, ed. Nenad Starc, 173–198. Landham, Boulder, New York, London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Peternel, Lana and Ana Perinić Lewis. 2025 [in print]. Perception and Visibility of the State on the Island of Žirje, Croatia. *Shima*.
- Petrić, Nikša and Stanislav Štambuk. 2007. *Ruzmarinska zadruga 1892. Obljetnica*. Velo Grablje: “Pjover” – udruga za zaštitu i revitalizaciju Velog Grablja.
- Podgorelec, Sonja, Margareta Gregurović, and Sanja Klempić Bogadi. 2015. Satisfaction with the Quality of Life on Croatian Small Islands: Zlarin, Kaprije and Žirje. *Island Studies Journal* 10 (1): 91–110. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24043/isj.322>.
- Podrug, Emil, Jelena Jović, and Željko Krnčević. 2016. Arheološka baština šibenskih otoka. In *Toponimija šibenskog otočja*, ed. Vladimir Skračić, 49–74. Zadar: Sveučilište u Zadru.
- Roglić, Josip. 1977. Prilog geografiji Hvara. In *Hvar u prirodnim znanostima (zbornik simpozija održanog 1975. g. u Hvaru u organizaciji Zavoda za povijest prirodnih, matematičkih i medicinskih znanosti JAZU)*. Zagreb: JAZU.
- Ronström, Owe. 2021. Remoteness, Islands and Islandness. *Island Studies Journal* 16 (2): 270–297. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24043/isj.162>.
- Runko Luttenberger, Lidija. 2017. Održiva vodoopskrba otoka. *Politehnika: Časopis za tehnički odgoj i obrazovanje* 1 (1): 45–55.
- Silver, Johnatan. 2011. Incremental Infrastructures: Material Improvisation and Social Collaboration Across Post-colonial Accra. *Urban Geography* 35 (6): 788–804. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2014.933605>.
- Simonić, Peter. 2024. The Island of Žirje: Challenging Claims of Isolation. *Traditiones* 53 (2): 63–91. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3986/Traditio2024530204>.
- Sirovica, Stjepan. 1994. Zabilješke o otoku Žirju u povijesti medicine Dalmacije povodom jedne epidemije malarije. In *Žirajski libar* 1, ed. Eduard Kale, 208–219. Šibenik: Nakladno povjerenstvo Žirajskog libra, Muzej grada Šibenika.
- Skračić, Vladimir and Nataša Šprljan. 2016. Semantička klasifikacija toponima na šibenskim otocima. In *Toponimija šibenskog otočja*, ed. Vladimir Skračić, 321–346. Zadar: Centar za jadranska onomastička istraživanja Sveučilišta u Zadru.

- Starc, Nenad. 2020. Introduction. In *The Notion of Near Islands. The Croatian Archipelago*, ed. Nenad Starc, 1–14. Boulder, New York, London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Taburšković, Vinko and Marin Mićunović. 2022. Značenje vode za razvoj Starog Grada i Starogradsčkog polja. In *Hvarski arhipelag i arheologija dalmatinskih otoka: od dinamične prošlosti do kulturnog turizma*, eds. Eduard Visković, Marina Ugarković, and Domagoj Tončinić, 173–181. Zagreb: Hrvatsko arheološko društvo, Institut za arheologiju.
- Vannini, Philip and Jonathan Taggart. 2013. Doing Islandness. A Non-representational Approach to an Island's Sense of Place. *Cultural Geographies* 20 (2): 225–242. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474474011428098>.
- Vitasović, Anton. 2006. Opskrba vodom i rimski vodovod na brdu Gradina na otoku Veliki Brijun. *Histria Archaeologica* 37: 47–82.
- Vlahović, Tatjana and Želimir Pekaš. 2002. Prirodni uvjeti, stanje i mogućnost vodoopskrbe Jadranskih otoka. In *Zbornik radova, I. znanstveno-stručni skup "Turizam, vodno gospodarstvo i zaštita mora"*, 105–119. Opatija.
- Von Schnitzler, Anita. 2013. Traveling Technologies: Infrastructure, Ethical Regimes, and the Materiality of Politics in South Africa. *Cultural Anthropology* 28 (4): 670–693. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/cuan.12032>.
- Voudouris, Konstantinos, Mohammad Valipour, Asimina Kaiafa, Xiao Yun Zheng, Rohitashw Kumar, Katharina Zanier, Elpida Kolokytha, and Andreas Angelaki. 2019. Evolution of Water Wells Focusing On Balkan and Asian Civilizations. *Water Supply* 19 (2): 347–364. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2166/ws.2018.114>.
- Vujnović, Nikša. 2022. Prilozi poznavanju toponimije istočnog dijela otoka Hvara. *Prilozi povijesti otoka Hvara* 15 (1): 317–331.
- Weiss, Linda. 2011. The State in the Economy: Neoliberal or Neoactivist? In *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Institutional Analysis*, eds. Glenn Morgan, John L. Campbell, Colin Crouch, Ove Kaj Pedersen, and Richard Whitley, 183–210. *Oxford Academic* [Online]. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199233762.003.0008>.
- Wells, E. Christian, Mathews J. Wakhungu, and W. Alex Webb. 2021. Water Infrastructures. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Anthropology*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190854584.013.474>.

Internet sources

- Internet 1. The Constitution of the Republic of Croatia as of 15.1.2014, Consolidated text, *Official Gazette* 56/90, 135/97, 113/00, 28/01, 76/10 and 5/14. URL: https://www.usud.hr/sites/default/files/dokumenti/The_consolidated_text_of_the_Constitution_of_the_Republic_of_Croatia_as_of_15_January_2014.pdf (accessed 2.6.2024).
- Internet 2. Hvarski vodovod [Hvar Water Supply Company]. History of water distribution. URL: <https://hvarskivodovod.hr/povijest-distribucije-pitke-vode> (accessed 10.5.2024).
- Internet 3. Hrvatske vode [Croatian Waters]. Multi-Annual Programme for the Construction of Municipal Water Structures for the Period up to 2030. URL: <https://voda.hr/sites/default/files/dokumenti/upravljanje-vodama/visegodisnji-programi/SA%C5%BDETAK%20-%20VPGKVG.pdf> (accessed 10.5.2024).
- Internet 4. K., J. 2022. U ovoj godini osigurano 15,8 milijuna kuna za opskrbu otoka pitkom vodom. *Morski.hr*, 6 March. URL: <https://www.morski.hr/u-ovoj-godini-osigurano-158-milijuna-kuna-za-opskrbu-otoka-pitkom-vodom> (accessed 12.8.2024).

- Internet 5. Zakon o otocima [The Island Act]. 2018. URL: <https://www.zakon.hr/z/638/Zakon-o-otocima> (accessed 2.5.2024).
- Internet 6. Croatian National Tourist Board. n.d. URL: <https://croatia.hr/en-gb/nature/robinson-crusoe-style-tourism-a-uniquely-croatian-experience-for-modern-adventurers> (accessed 2.10.2024).
- Internet 7. Najudaljeniji šibenski otok. Otok Žirje zaboravljen kao Kuba: umjesto “Cadillaca”, na cestama “jugiči” i “stojadini”. 2017. *Šibenski portal*, 21 July. URL: <https://net.hr/danas/vijesti/otok-zirje-zaboravljen-kao-kuba-umjesto-cadillaca-na-cestama-jugici-i-stojadini-73d28032-b9f0-11ec-94a7-0242ac120015> (accessed 2.7.2024).
- Internet 8. Žirje ili hrvatska Kuba: Rajski otok čudesnih pogleda i bizarnih detalja. 2023. *ŠibenikIN*, 24 June. URL: <https://m.sibenik.in/foto/zirje-ili-hrvatska-kuba-rajski-otok-cudesnih-pogleda-i-bizarnih-detalja/174471.html> (accessed 2.7.2024).
- Internet 9. Plan vodoopskrbe Šibensko-kninske županije [Water Supply Plan of the County of Šibenik-Knin]. 2010. URL: https://voda.hr/sites/default/files/2021-11/plan_vodoopskrbe_sibensko-kninske_zupanije_tekst.pdf (accessed 11.8.2024).
- Internet 10. Hvarski vodovod [Hvar Water Supply Company]. URL: <https://hvarskivodovod.hr/vodoopskrbni-sustav> (accessed 12.4.2024).

Povezani z vodo, izolirani zaradi vode: voda in oskrba z vodo na dveh hrvaških otokih

Življenje brez vodne infrastrukture vpliva na vsakdanje življenje otočanov in pogosto omejuje njihov gospodarski razvoj. V članku je predstavljena etnografska raziskava o pomanjkljivi vodni infrastrukturi na dveh hrvaških otokih – na Žirju in vzhodnem delu Hvara, ki ponazarjata spreminjajoče se izkušnje razvoja v izoliranih skupnostih. Gre namreč za različne oblike izoliranosti, odmaknjenosti in zamejenosti, ki so se ohranile skozi zgodovino in se danes zaradi pomanjkanja vode ali zanemarjene vodne infrastrukture nadaljujejo ali celo krepijo. Otočani so odvisni od dostave vode s cisternami in tovornjaki. Njihovo življenje in preživetje se razlikujeta od življenja celinskega prebivalstva in večine drugih otočanov. Poleg običajnih izzivov otoškega življenja so še posebej zaskrbljeni zaradi transporta, količine in kakovosti vode, potrebne za njihove dnevne potrebe in turizem. Na podlagi etnografskih podatkov se analiza osredinja na vlogo države, kakor jo dojemajo otočani, pri zgraditvi, rekonstrukciji in vzdrževanju vodovodne infrastrukture na otokih ter na strategije obvladovanja otočanov, ki so živel brez stabilnih virov pitne vode. Etnografska raziskava vode na otokih, kjer je voda že od nekdaj redek in dragocen vir, kritično raziše družbeno, kulturno in ekonomsko vlogo vode kot dejavnika preživetja ali izginjanja ter njene politične in demografske posledice.

Revitalizing Robidišče: Navigating the Challenges and Opportunities of Marginalized Rural Communities

Katarina Polajnar Horvat

ZRC SAZU, Anton Melik Geographical Institute, Slovenia

katarina.polajnar@zrc-sazu.si

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8872-529X>

This article deals with the revitalization of Robidišče, a village affected by depopulation and economic decline. Through the preservation of cultural heritage, sustainable tourism, and community engagement, the village has noticeably improved. The study examines how local efforts and external support have strengthened social cohesion and revitalization. Despite progress, challenges remain, highlighting the importance of further sustainable practices and community-oriented initiatives.

▪ **Keywords:** marginalization, rural revitalization, cultural heritage, tourism, sustainable development

V članku je obravnavana revitalizacija Robidišča, vasi, ki sta jo prizadeli izrazita depopulacija in gospodarsko nazadovanje. Z ohranjanjem kulturne dediščine, trajnostnim turizmom in dejavnostmi skupnosti je vas dosegla opazen napredek. V raziskavi je bila opravljena analiza, kako so lokalne pobude in zunanja podpora prispevale k večji socialni koheziji in oživljanju skupnosti. Kljub napredku pa ostaja niz izzivov, kar poudarja pomen nadaljnjih praks vzdržnosti in pobud, ki so usmerjene v skupnost.

▪ **Ključne besede:** marginalizacija, oživljanje podeželja, kulturna dediščina, turizem, trajnostni razvoj

Introduction

Marginalization is a complex phenomenon that affects the lives of individuals and communities in a variety of ways (Nel, Pelc, 2020). It can be defined as a condition or process in which an individual or community is separated from broader social, economic and political networks, limiting access to resources, information, and connections that are critical to development and wellbeing (Leimgruber, 1994, 2004). In the humanities and social sciences, marginalization is studied from various perspectives, such as social, political, and economic (Pelc, 2017, 2018). Each of these dimensions sheds light on how disconnection from broader social networks affects individuals and communities.

In rural and remote regions, marginalization is often spatial because physical distance from urban centers increases social and economic challenges (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018; Doyon et al., 2020). These communities face limited access to basic services (e.g., healthcare, education, and connectivity), lack of infrastructure, fewer economic opportunities, and demographic decline because residents move to more developed areas (Kühn, 2015; Rodríguez-Pose, 2018; Heffner, Latocha, 2020). Marginalization encompasses not only physical distance from urban centers, but also socioeconomic and cultural conditions that determine the functioning of communities in local and national

systems (Nel, Pelc, 2020). The lack of economic and political connections leads to the exclusion of these areas because they often lack the political and economic power to make decisions that affect their development and are consequently marginalized in social, economic, and political life (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018; Sørensen, Svendsen, 2023).

However, marginalization is not only negative. Despite spatial, economic, and political marginalization, these areas often have unique natural resources (e.g., water resources, plants, animals, etc.) and social resources such as cultural heritage and traditional practices that can be harnessed for their development. The preservation of local traditions, close ties to nature, and strong community cohesion are often strengths of marginalized areas, whereas these characteristics are more difficult to achieve in urban areas (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018; Anastasiou et al., 2021). Marginalization can also promote sustainable forms of development based on local natural and cultural assets that contribute to reducing dependence on external resources and strengthening local subsistence economies, including sustainable tourism (Razpotnik Visković, Komac, 2021).

There is a consensus in the geographical literature that marginal areas, such as rural and remote villages, are often labeled as “places that do not matter,” leading to their political and economic neglect (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018; Rodríguez-Pose et al., 2023; Sørensen, Svendsen, 2023). Furthermore, there are research gaps in investigating how these communities can defy isolation and utilize their unique characteristics for sustainable development. Most research has focused on the challenges that arise from marginalization, and less attention has been paid to the potential opportunities that arise from preserving the natural and cultural heritage and social capital of these areas (Sampson, Goodrich, 2009). Therefore, there is a need to explore practices that can promote resilience and sustainable development in marginalized communities.

In this context, the research focuses on Robidišče, the westernmost village in Slovenia, which has been marginalized for decades due to its location and its specific historical and socioeconomic conditions. Robidišče faces various challenges, particularly infrastructural, economic, and demographic, and this study analyzes whether these obstacles also present opportunities for community revitalization through sustainable tourism, preservation of cultural heritage, local agricultural practices, and strengthening of social cohesion, which could make possible sustainable use of local resources and reinforce community identity. This study analyzes how marginalization affects the socioeconomic conditions of the village and what strategies have been applied in Robidišče to reduce the effects of marginalization and strengthen community resilience. The study not only sheds light on the specific case of Robidišče, but also contributes to broader discussions on marginalization in rural areas and explores approaches that can make possible balanced and sustainable development in similar communities. The central research questions of this study are: 1) How has marginalization specifically impacted the socioeconomic conditions in Robidišče? 2) What strategies have been

applied in Robidišče to mitigate the effects of marginalization, and how have they contributed to strengthening community resilience? and 3) What key lessons from the case of Robidišče can be applied to similarly marginalized rural communities?

The research uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of marginalization in Robidišče. These methods include ethnographic fieldwork, semi-structured interviews, historical and demographic analysis, and institutional data review. In terms of structure, the article is organized as follows: the presentation of the theoretical background is followed by a section on methodology and presentation of the case study, an analysis, a discussion, and a conclusion.

Theoretical background

Marginalization is not only a consequence of spatial distance from urban centers but also includes social and economic components that manifest themselves in the weaker connection of residents to regional and national networks and in limited opportunities for inclusion in broader social, political, and economic currents (Nel, Pelc, 2020). Marginalized areas are often neglected and excluded from development interventions and investments due to the lack of key resources such as adequate infrastructure, political power, and market access, which further exacerbates their backwardness (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018; Nel, Pelc, 2020). Sørensen and Svendsen (2023) emphasize the role of political capital, which is crucial for the inclusion of marginalized communities in broader development processes. The lack of political capital means that residents of these areas do not have enough power to influence decisions that would grant them access to resources and development opportunities. This leads to further marginalization because these communities remain excluded from decision-making processes, reducing their chances of improving infrastructure, social, and economic conditions (Sørensen, Svendsen, 2023).

Such areas can be understood within the concept of “places that do not matter,” which refers to places that are often deemed unimportant by wider social and economic systems and are often systemically excluded. They are characterized by a lack of economic potential and political weight, which means that they do not attract enough attention and investment for their development. As a result, the living conditions of the residents deteriorate because there are few opportunities to improve infrastructure, economic growth, and participation in broader development processes. This situation favors demographic decline because young and employable residents migrate to more developed regions where opportunities are better. This leads to an aging population, a shrinking workforce, and lower economic productivity. This creates a vicious circle of marginalization that is difficult to overcome without external support or changes to development strategies (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018, 2020).

Despite the challenges faced by marginalized communities, their resilience and the ability to adapt to change, cope with it, and develop sustainable solutions despite the constraints are of great importance. Resilience encompasses both collective and individual adaptation strategies (Paniagua, 2017). Collective strategies often include community organization, self-sufficiency strategies for joint projects such as developing local infrastructure, strengthening local networks, and promoting sustainable economic activities. These strategies allow residents to connect with each other, share resources, and strengthen community cohesion, which improves their chances of survival in isolation. In addition to collective strategies, individual forms of resilience are also crucial, which include adapting to everyday conditions and finding innovative solutions to improve living standards (Paniagua, 2017).

Cultural heritage plays an important role in shaping resilience (Gocer et al., 2024). Preserving local practices and traditions allows residents to maintain their identity and connection to historical roots, which contributes to their sense of belonging and social cohesion. A sense of place creates a strong social network that allows residents to better cope with challenges and adapt to change (Sampson, Goodrich, 2009). Cultural heritage not only contributes to the preservation of community values but also opens up opportunities for economic development, particularly through sustainable tourism based on local values and characteristics. Sustainable tourism can thus be a key factor for resilience because it allows cultural heritage and natural resources to be included in tourism without losing their identity. This creates new economic opportunities, reduces dependence on traditional economic activities such as agriculture, and increases the resilience of the local population to wider economic changes (Stojanović et al., 2014). However, it is crucial that such initiatives be accompanied by appropriate investment in infrastructure, digital connectivity, and political participation because these elements are essential to break the cycle of marginalization.

One possible solution is the development of digital infrastructure. Access to digital services, such as broadband internet, allows residents of isolated areas to connect to broader economic flows and improve their social inclusion, access to education, labor markets, and social networks. Digital development also allows the creation of new forms of work and business opportunities and the diversification of the economy, which can help reduce the marginalization of these communities and improve their quality of life (Pervez et al., 2022). In addition to digital infrastructure, other strategies play an important role in addressing marginalization and fostering community resilience. One such strategy is sustainable tourism, which aims to develop tourism while respecting local resources, traditions, and environmental limits. This approach can promote economic growth while preserving cultural heritage and ensuring long-term sustainability (Stojanović et al., 2014). The preservation of cultural heritage itself is another crucial strategy because it helps maintain traditional practices, architecture, and local history, all of which are key to strengthening a community's identity and resilience in the face of external pressures (Gocer et al., 2024).

Agricultural revitalization and local production have also emerged as important components in reducing marginalization. By reintroducing traditional agricultural practices and fostering local food production, communities can reduce their dependence on external markets and build more sustainable local economies (Razpotnik Visković, Komac, 2021). Finally, social cohesion and community engagement are vital strategies for promoting resilience. Strong community bonds and active participation are essential for both economic resilience and social wellbeing because they make collective action possible and support networks that help communities adapt to change (Paniagua, 2017).

Methodology

This research on the marginalization of Robidišče was based on qualitative methods that provided comprehensive insight into the various dimensions of this complex phenomenon. The ethnographic research was conducted in Robidišče during a five-day stay in August 2023 and via Zoom with residents that were not present at that time. During my stay I had extensive contact with the residents because I stayed with them. I observed their daily lives, spent days with them, participated in their chores, and followed how they cope with the challenges of living in the village. This interaction gave me unique insight into their way of life, their values, and their way of building a community.

The study involved fifteen semi-structured interviews with permanent or seasonal residents; that is, those that stay in the village on weekends or during the summer. The interviews were designed to cover important topics such as living conditions, social cohesion, economic activities, perception of isolation, infrastructure, sustainable tourism, and the future of the village. In this way, I obtained qualitative data on the subjective experiences and views of the residents. I gained a better understanding of the living conditions and attitudes in the village. This allowed me to follow the local living and environmental practices more closely and to get to know the people that live there better. I also got to know people for whom Robidišče is a place of seasonal work or vacation, either for a day or for several days, and observed their activities. I also analyzed the population statistics of Robidišče from 1869 to 2023 (SiSTAT, 2024), which provides information on demographic changes and migration trends. The research also involved the local community, which provided additional data and insights and strengthened local support for the research efforts.

Research area

The study area, Robidišče, is located in the Breginj Combe, in far western Slovenia, at the crossroads of three cultures, between the Venetian Slovenian hinterland, the Romance world, and Friuli (Ščukovt, 2016). The village borders on neighboring Italy, which borders it to the north, west, and south (Figure 1). Between 1815 and 1866,

the area belonged to Austria, and in 1866 it was annexed to the Kingdom of Italy. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Robidišče was a prosperous village for the time, with forty-two houses on the Austrian side of the border between Austria and Italy (Ščukovt, 2019). Although Robidišče belonged to the Austrian side, its population had regular contact with the Venetian (or Italian) side (Kladnik, 1977). In the period after the First World War, the entire Littoral area belonged to Italy. Thus, economic and social contacts with the nearby villages of Prossenicco, Montefosca, and other villages in Venetian Slovenia increased. It is no coincidence that Robidišče has a Mediterranean architectural identity, just like the rest of Venetian Slovenia and the Breginj Combe (Miklavčič-Brezigar, 1995). In 1869, the village had 178 residents, by 1910 the number of residents had risen to 228, and since then the population has declined sharply. In 1991, the village had only seventeen residents, in 2000 only eight, in 2010 also eight, in 2020 eleven, and in 2023 seventeen (SiSTAT, 2024). The last child was born in the village in 1981.

After the Second World War, when the Littoral was annexed to Yugoslavia, Robidišče ended up on the Yugoslav side. The new border between Italy and Yugoslavia, which ran directly behind the village, cut it off completely from its natural hinterland in Venetian Slovenia, with which the residents had maintained close ties for centuries (Miklavčič-Brezigar, 1995). The darker history of the village began after 1947, when the current border was established, separating Robidišče from Venetian Slovenia. The Yugoslav army and the communist regime imposed a new social order on the village

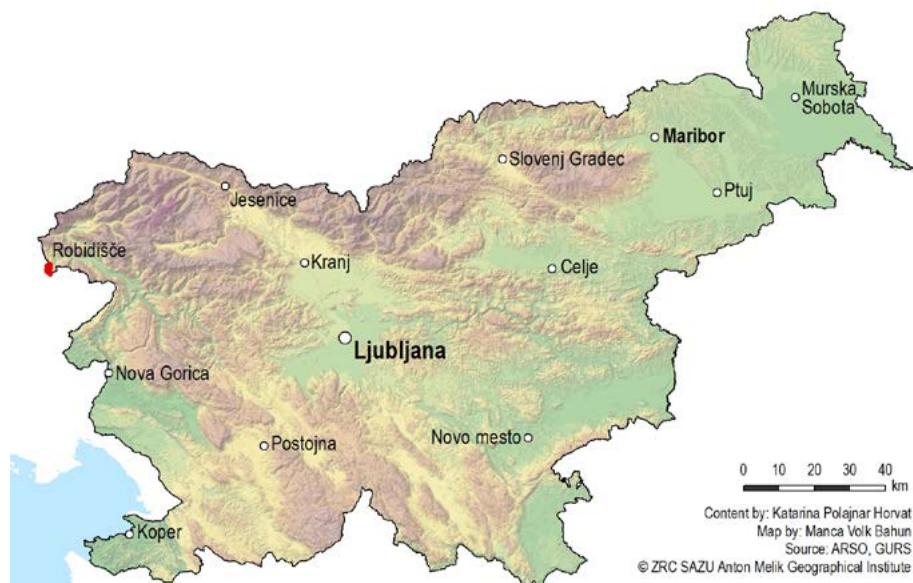


Figure 1: Robidišče is the westernmost village in Slovenia, and it is bordered on three sides by Italy. Author: Manca Volk Bahun.

and exerted considerable political and psychological pressure on the residents. The loss of ties with neighboring villages, with which the residents of Robidišče had been closely connected, led to a deep sense of disconnection and insecurity for many. As a result, between 1947 and 1952, almost half of the residents emigrated across the border to Italy and from there to the rest of the world, mainly to North and South America. More than 150 locals left under cover of darkness with carts and whatever they could carry. The reasons for their emigration were either political or economic, but also the fact that people had lost contact with the places across the border that they had been connected to for many years. Relationships with neighboring villages across the border were part of their identity and daily life, and so the loss of these ties was particularly painful. However, it is important to note that this experience was not unique to Robidišče or the border regions. After the Second World War, similar migrations occurred throughout Yugoslavia, with many people leaving their homes in search of a better life. This is reminiscent of Wright's 2002 book *The Village that Died for England*; in the case of Robidišče, one could speak of "the village that died for Yugoslavia." The homes in the village began to fall into disrepair, and many houses were abandoned for good. Then came industrialization and the abandonment of agriculture, which led to further exodus from the village. The 1976 earthquake with a magnitude of around 8, which changed the face of the village, also contributed to the exodus. Only a few people remained in the village. Reconstruction after the earthquake was never fully completed, and the houses remained largely empty (Miklavčič-Brezigar, 2001). Nevertheless, the characteristics of Mediterranean architecture typical of the entire Breginj region have been preserved, and Robidišče is no exception.

The revitalization of Robidišče and the restoration of the dilapidated houses in the village began in 1995 with the organization of the event From the North, South, East, and West (encompassing several border towns). A group of locals and friends of Robidišče founded a group called Preserve Robidišče, which officially became part of the Stol Cultural Association in 1998. The aim of the group was to preserve cultural heritage through cultural and tourist events titled Let's Get to Know Each Other and other activities aimed at preserving the westernmost village in Slovenia (Ščukovt, 2016). Inga Miklavčič-Brezigar from the Gorizia Museum wrote in the brochure *Robidišče: vas med življenjem in smrtjo ali kako prižgati iskro na ugaslem ognjišču* (Robidišče: A Village between Life and Death, or How to Rekindle a Fire on an Extinguished Hearth) that this was the moment when Robidišče awoke (Miklavčič-Brezigar, 1995). At that time, the restoration of dilapidated and abandoned buildings began, and various volunteer camps for students of different disciplines were organized under the umbrella of the ŠKUC organization. Thus, Robidišče began to revive through the efforts of volunteers, mostly students and not just locals. Otherwise, the revival of the village would have been in question because there were only a handful of young people in the village at the time, and even they were only occasional residents. Through their youth,

work, and enthusiasm, they helped change and improve the social status of the older citizens. Since then, various events and activities have been carried out in Robidišče, including museographic endeavors, ethnographic and geographic projects and camps, social support, systematic media promotion, publishing work, and other activities that have contributed to the recognition of the village (Kravanja, 1999; Ščukovt, 2016).

An important factor in the revitalization of the village was the return of a local farmer, who revived agriculture, especially livestock breeding and the associated production of dairy products, which had a positive effect on the previously intensively overgrown cultivated landscape. Grazing and mowing of the meadows was resumed, and a communal barn and hayloft were built.

Another important milestone for the reconstruction of the village was the adoption of the Act on the Reconstruction of Structures after the Earthquake and the Promotion of Development in the Soča Valley (*Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia* no. 45/98), following the 1998 earthquake in the Soča Valley. On the basis of this law, the village and its residents received financial resources that were used to reconstruct homes (Mesec, 2013). One woman from the village stated that “*after the earthquake*” in 1998 “*there were funds, and that was an opportunity to renovate this house.*” The creation of one of the country’s first cross-border cycle paths, developed as part of the PHARE-CBC cross-border initiative in 1998, also had a significant impact on development. The Municipality of Kobarid played a key role in planning and implementing the project, which made it possible to connect Robidišče with the surrounding tourist routes. This cycling trail attracted many tourists that passed through the village on their way to other destinations, which contributed to greater awareness of the area and an increase in tourist visits. The opening of the trail enhanced opportunities for sustainable tourism development because tourists began to discover the natural beauty, cultural heritage, and uniqueness of Robidišče, leading to an increase in economic activity in the village and connections with other cross-border areas. Although at first glance the history of Robidišče could be interpreted as a story of perseverance and resilience, it is more appropriate to understand it as a story of change, adaptation, and the search for new ways of life in changing circumstances. The former agricultural lifestyle gradually disappeared after the earthquake and social changes, as did the traditional way of life that had been part of the community for centuries. In the 1990s, the revival of the village began, characterized mainly by tourism, weekend visits, cross-border projects, and efforts to preserve and enhance cultural heritage. Robidišče, as part of the wider Breginj Combe and Upper Soča Valley, entered a new era in which the remoteness and tranquility of the place are promoted as unique values, positioning it as a place of peace, relaxation, recreation, and spiritual growth.

A monument with the inscription *Le kam ste vsi odšli?* (Where have you all gone?) stands at the end of the village of Robidišče, just before the border with Italy, and commemorates the emigration of many of the village’s residents in the past (Figure 2).



Figure 2: *Where Have You All Gone?* A monument in Robidišče commemorating the emigration of the residents. Photo: Katarina Polajnar Horvat, 10.7.2024.

The monument was erected in 2013 by local residents and students as part of the Woodstone workshop to commemorate the exodus that followed the historical events after the Second World War, when a new border separated Robidišče from its natural hinterland and led to many migrations due to political, economic, and social pressures. The monument is located at the place where the border was felt most strongly by the community, at the very edge of the village. It symbolizes the transition and loss of contact with previous connections across the border and, on the other hand, also points to the end of one way of life and the beginning of another, unknown way of life for those that left.



Analysis

Community and demographics of Robidišče

In 2023, there were seventeen officially registered residents in Robidišče, ten of whom lived permanently in the village and the rest part time. Several families that are second- or third-generation descendants of the residents of Robidišče have renovated their houses and occasionally come to the village from various parts of Slovenia. They come mainly on weekends, during vacations, and in the summer. In recent years, social cohesion in the village has grown thanks to active and committed people. The younger generations returning to the village are an important turning point in the demographic and social dynamics. Over the last two years, since a new chairman took over the management of the agricultural community, the community has met regularly and together developed a vision for the village, which it summarizes as follows:

a village designed according to the needs of the residents, mowed, houses restored, walls repaired, safe ruins, polished country houses, multifunctional spaces, a clean river and a focus on sustainability for guests, vegetable gardens and tree plantations, an inn, a farm, cleared pastures where crossings are possible, marked hiking and cycling trails, cows, sheep, and goats, walking families, children playing, cyclists and hikers, school groups, an open-air museum with old photos, a multipurpose room, benches in the village and at viewpoints, chickens and (tidy) manure heaps, firewood, or stones. (Mesec, 2022)

There are currently no children under age fifteen living permanently in the village. Two children are officially registered in the village and attend elementary school in the nearby larger village of Breginj. They live permanently in Italy, just over the Slovenian border, and are descendants of the last child born in Robidišče. The main reason why the children attend the Slovenian school in Breginj is that their parents want to maintain contact with Slovenian language and culture.

Economic activities and challenges

Most of the permanent residents are retired. Those that are gainfully employed are engaged in various activities. In Robidišče, there are few opportunities to earn a living from just one activity. As the owner of a farm that lives on the other side of the border but was born in Robidišče said: “*You can not make a living here with one activity, you have to have several things, otherwise you can not do it.*” He runs a tourism business in the summer, he has a farm, he ploughs in the winter, and he mows and landscapes the roadsides in the spring. In this way, he has a sustainable livelihood. Agriculture in the village has largely been abandoned. The migration of residents for better job

opportunities, better education, and better quality of life in terms of services has led to a decline in the workforce that continues to farm. In addition, the land in the village and its immediate surroundings is highly fragmented, which often makes farming financially unsustainable.

Small farmers do not have the means to make the necessary investments—and, even if they had them, they could not use them because the terrain in Robidišče and the surrounding area is too rugged. Traditional farming in these areas has always consisted of grazing and mowing, which helps preserve the grassland. In recent years, however, grazing and mowing have been abandoned. There have been no cows in the village for several years. The residents are indifferent to the appearance of the village. The village is overgrown, and it is not mowed. *“It makes me sad that the village is slowly being abandoned, it makes me sad because this village is so beautiful to me and it makes me sad to see it abandoned like this. It’s a real shame that it’s being neglected like this,”* said a young pensioner that spends the warm season in the village. She also pointed out that the hiking trails are quite overgrown: *“The footpaths are not maintained, everything is overgrown, which is a shame because we do not all come up to cycle, some of us would go hiking but you can not because the grass is too high.”*

Nevertheless, the residents largely try to look after themselves, they have their own gardens, and some keep animals such as chickens, sheep, or goats. There are also efforts to allow cows to graze in the village again.

Institutional support and collaborative efforts

An important factor in the revitalization of Robidišče was the role of various institutional initiatives that contributed to the development of the village. The Municipality of Kobarid, for example, played a central role in supporting infrastructure and tourism projects, including the creation of cross-border connections with neighboring Italy. One notable initiative was the development of one of the first cross-border cycling routes, funded under the PHARE CBC program, which increased the visibility of Robidišče and connected it to wider tourism networks. As one resident noted, *“The cross-border bike trail really put us on the map. Before, only a few people knew about Robidišče, but now we get cyclists and hikers passing through, and that’s brought some life back to the village.”*

Another initiative was the inclusion of Robidišče in the Natura 2000 network, which focuses on the conservation of natural habitats and biodiversity. This framework has been instrumental in ensuring that the development of the area adheres to certain environmental standards, preserving the natural heritage while allowing sustainable tourism growth. In addition, local organizations such as the Soča Valley Development Center have actively supported the revitalization efforts. The center promoted projects aimed at marketing Robidišče as a tourist destination while focusing on heritage preservation. The center’s initiatives included holding cultural events, developing educational trails, and creating promotional materials highlighting the village’s unique cultural and natural

treasures. As one interviewee mentioned, *“The Soča Valley Development Center has been really helpful. They contributed to Robidišče having public transport, at least in summer, which has significantly improved connections to the village, and they’ve helped us with getting funding for some of the repairs in the village.”*

These institutional efforts have not only provided financial and logistical support but also connected Robidišče to larger networks that allow access to resources that would otherwise be difficult to obtain. As one long-term resident reflected, *“Without the support of the municipality and projects like PHARE-CBC, I don’t think the tourists would be here in such numbers.”*

Community identity

Some residents identify themselves with the term *Rbiščani* (Robidišče residents), which indicates a rather narrow and specific identity closely linked to the place. In this way, they reflect a strong local attachment and pride in their surroundings. In the case of Robidišče, this is no coincidence because historical, cultural, and kinship circumstances have created a strong identity and cohesion that has allowed the community to survive. The village’s connection with the Breginj Combe has also played a crucial role in shaping its identity because the cultural and historical ties with the surrounding villages have helped maintain social bonds and support. Although the natural conditions of the village and its surroundings, with its remoteness and the age structure of the population, do not at first glance offer tangible circumstances for positive development, its appearance has had a strong influence on those that have left it weekly, monthly, or even for several years or decades. The emigrants and their descendants are happy to return to their old, half-destroyed homes, which are slowly being rebuilt. They make an important contribution to the revitalization of the village. Most of them are locals that worked elsewhere in their youth and are now retired. They live temporarily in Robidišče during the warm season and on weekends. They have time and are motivated to participate in organizing local events and restoring and preserving cultural heritage, thus contributing to the creation of a local identity. Institutions such as the Municipality of Kobarid and the Soča Valley Development Center have also supported these efforts, fostering connections between Robidišče and the wider region, the Breginj Combe, and even the Soča Valley. The returning residents are also a source of rich knowledge about the village, traditional customs and habits, life experiences, and traditional values, and a source of passing on tasks, local stories, and legends to younger generations. They make a significant contribution to the local economy by investing in and renovating properties, revitalizing the gardens around their houses, and landscaping the immediate surroundings of their homes. One of them said that Robidišče *“is a special place that has a special energy, such a positive energy because there is so much greenery here.”* Their presence goes beyond simple restoration efforts. It fosters a deeper connection to the community’s cultural roots. This ongoing commitment ensures that Robidišče retains

its unique character and gives future generations the opportunity to experience a way of life that is becoming increasingly rare in today's fast-paced world. As another resident said, *"Our efforts are not just for us, but also for the children that come here so they can see and understand where they come from and why this place is so important."*

Tourism development

In 2002, intensive restoration of architectural heritage for tourist purposes began, in particular the renovation of the Škvor farm. After the renovation was completed in 2006, the first visitor accommodation was opened in the village. Later, the family restored the old family barn and acquired other outbuildings. Shortly after the Škvor farm was renovated, other farms that had been saved by their owners were also restored. In 2010, the village had twenty guest beds. To date, several abandoned buildings have been renovated and converted into tourist facilities. The owner describes his vision as follows: *"We believe that in life we must not only take, but also preserve, so that what our ancestors created is preserved for our descendants. We see Robidišče as a leap out of our comfort zone and a testing ground for the development and implementation of ideas."*

After 2010, a local man that was reviving farming began to develop the idea of a vacation farm. After working in transportation for many years and spending many days on the road in various countries, he decided, as he described, *"to settle down in one place, in my home village, it was a call for my home village, for nostalgia, for an idyll, and for village life."*

At first he offered dairy products, but, as time went on and demand grew, he began to offer traditional dishes from northeastern Italy and western Slovenia, such as frittata, polenta, gnocchi, minestrone, lamb in sauce, and so on. His ancestors had always made cheese, although they had cows, whereas today he keeps dairy sheep. The farm became a tourist business, offering accommodation in a restored house and a campsite. Later, the owner decided to sell the house and had to close the guesthouse and campsite due to a lack of operating licenses. He believes that *"running a farm is a lot of work and you don't get back as much as you put in,"* but he will continue when his permits are reinstated.

The buyer of the house has converted the entire building into a cycling center with a bed and breakfast and a bar. He has also built six single-lane cycle paths on the slopes between the village and the Nadiža River. The center flourished for seven years, but then the owner was forced to close all the trails due to disagreements over the use of the mountain bike trails. The facility is still in operation and offers accommodation and other amenities. While it was operational, the center attracted many mountain bikers and hikers, resulting in an increase in tourist traffic as visitors began to explore the local attractions and enjoy the natural beauty of the area. However, in addition to the positive effects, the opening of the center also had some negative consequences. *"Robidišče suddenly went from being a forgotten village to a mountain bike center,"*



commented one local resident. She said: *“At a certain time, especially during COVID-19, when Slovenians flocked here to spend their vacation vouchers, it was very crowded, too crowded. People parked everywhere—on the roadside, on the streets, on private properties. Not to mention the noise at night when the tourists were partying. We do not want that in the village, so it’s a real blessing that the hiking trails are closed this year.”*

Given these challenges, it is clear from the residents’ concerns that tourism must develop within a framework of sustainable practices. Several interviewees expressed worry that unplanned tourism could lead to environmental degradation and the loss of the natural and cultural values that make Robidišče unique. These discussions emphasize how strongly residents prioritize sustainability, viewing it as essential for preserving the village’s character. Their emphasis on participatory planning further reflects the community’s desire to be actively involved in shaping tourism development, ensuring that it is based on the responsible use of local resources. This collective sentiment underscores the importance of sustainability as a key issue in Robidišče, as one resident emphasized: *“It is important to attract tourists, but we have to be careful not to lose what makes us special—our nature and the tranquility we find here. We do not want Robidišče to become a tourist attraction that loses its authenticity. We want people to understand and respect our way of life.”*

An example of best practice in sustainable tourism is the approach of a young family living just over the border in Italy. The family runs a vacation farm based on the principles of sustainability, local self-sufficiency, and coexistence with nature. The young co-owner explained: *“We live in a valley on the border with Slovenia, isolated from the rest of the world and immersed in the magical energy of this place.”* They focus on using locally grown organic produce and have increasingly turned to vegetarian and vegan cuisine in recent years to promote sustainability.

“Living in harmony with animals and nature has led us to offer almost exclusively vegetarian and vegan dishes in recent years, which gives our cuisine a unique and refined flavor,” he explains. This practice not only supports environmental protection, but also offers visitors a healthy culinary experience in the middle of the local environment. Deer and other animals are bred on the farm, and a wide range of vegetables and medicinal herbs are grown, creating a model for self-sufficiency. The co-owner emphasizes how important the connection to nature is: *“In Robidišče there has always been a special energy of the people and the place, which you can still feel today. It’s open here, the wind, the air; it’s always more difficult than in the valley, but we find peace here.”*

After living in the city, the family decided to return to this area to show their commitment to a simpler and more meaningful way of life, which she wants to pass on to her children. *“You have to want to work on a farm, that’s my thing. If you can’t, you give up—it’s too hard; here you work all day, every day,”* said the co-owner, emphasizing the dedication required to maintain this way of life.

Infrastructure issues

In addition to the lack of well-planned tourist development, one of the shortcomings of the village is its infrastructure. The village's water supply comes from Italy, where it is the main source for Robidišče and some of the villages on the Italian side. The water intake is also co-managed by the Municipality of Kobarid. In the long term, problems with ownership and water rights are expected over this point, which will have to be resolved at an international level. In the past, the water supply from Italy was unstable at times, which is why a larger water reservoir was built in 2018. Part of the water pipeline and a pipeline for fire hydrants were also built. Nevertheless, water is conserved in summer, the public wells are closed, and water is transported from Kobarid. The village is also not equipped with a sewage system. In the future, it would be worth planning joint investment in communal wastewater disposal; for example, in a joint sewage treatment plant.

The electricity grid is well developed. Solar panels have been installed on the roof of the communal barn. The residents have expressed their interest in buying or renovating the current solar panel system to contribute to the village's self-sufficiency. On the other hand, the village lacks an adequate internet connection. This can be remedied by purchasing signal boosters and more powerful modems—which, however, are associated with higher costs. One of the interviewees mentioned: *“We had to invest in signal boosters to be able to use the internet at all.”* There is great interest in this because it would make it easier to work remotely, contact a doctor, and study remotely, and it would facilitate digital administration. The road to the village is poorly maintained and narrow. People feel uncomfortable driving on the road: *“I am afraid someone will get hurt or have an accident because the road is so bad; we need something safer.”* There is also no store in the village. There is a traveling grocery store once a week, but only in summer. This makes it difficult for immobile residents to access essential goods such as food, medicine, and hygiene products. According to one resident, people feel dependent on others, but on the other hand they have always managed in their own way: *“I grow a lot of my own food in my garden, I plan my shopping in advance and make a list so that I don't forget anything important. That way I can avoid unnecessary trips. Sometimes we swap what we grow, or, if we don't have something, we borrow it from a neighbor.”*

The president of the agrarian community described the subsistence system as follows: *“A small local economy has developed in the village in terms of local supply of vegetables, dairy products, eggs, and also some meat products, so that both locals and guests within the village are largely self-sufficient.”*

A major challenge in the village is the abandoned buildings and the land surrounding them, which is partly due to the complex ownership structure and partly due to the fragmentation of the land. Many of the owners of the buildings and land are deceased or live abroad, which makes it difficult to obtain permits to legally renovate the properties.

To make matters worse, locals have long been reluctant to sell their properties to newcomers, even to people from nearby Kobarid, because they are seen as outsiders. As a result, many buildings remain vacant and their surroundings are gradually becoming overgrown, which has a negative impact on the overall character and vitality of the village. The increasing overgrowth of the land and the village's character is mainly a consequence of the abandonment of agricultural activity.

New nonnative residents and their impact

In recent years, an interesting trend of immigration to Robidišče has been observed, with some people from the United States, Germany, and elsewhere in Slovenia settling permanently in the village. The reasons for their arrival are quite similar: *“When I first came to the village, I thought: this is paradise on earth. The beauty of nature, and the peace and tranquility captivated me so much that I was immediately convinced to buy this house. Here I’m directly connected to nature; I wake up every day with a view of Mount Krn”*; *“The village offered me the chance for a new beginning. Here I’ve found my place where I can realize my dreams, lead a simpler lifestyle, less stressful and in contact with nature. The village has strong energy, and the Nadiža River is a particularly mystical place for me that radiates mysticism.”*

On the one hand, the permanent residents see this as an advantage. As one of them said, *“The presence of foreigners has brought a breath of fresh air, new ideas, and world views to our village.”* On the other hand, some of them see it as negative: *“People come to the village who have no history here, no roots; they travel to work far away and have no sense of belonging to this place.”*

The fourth generation of local children, who come on weekends and during the summer vacations, has great potential to further revitalize the village. Although they do not live in Robidišče permanently, the children of the residents are emotionally and culturally connected to the village and bring life to it. Weekend and holiday visits allow them to connect with their family roots, traditions, and the nature of the village. The parents of these children have chosen to renovate old houses and properties, which contributes to the revitalization of the village. Such renovations not only improve the infrastructure, but also attract other visitors and potential residents. The organization of various events, workshops, and social gatherings strengthens the sense of community and encourages cooperation between permanent and temporary residents and visitors. This could lead to a new wave of residents that will further revitalize the village. Young people bring fresh ideas and perspectives. Their presence can lead to new projects and initiatives that contribute to the development of Robidišče and create new opportunities for work and life.

The interaction and connection with the local environment—and with it the natural hinterland of Venetian Slovenia and also with the Breginj Combe—is still intense. A number of relatives that have moved away from the village live in these nearby regions

and are still connected to the area through various activities. The municipality holds many events for the locals themselves and for visitors from outside. The owners of the Škvor farm have created a gallery in a protected former barn that houses a small museum and a permanent photo collection, which is available as a space for community events, workshops, meetings, and lectures. The village is also home to an open-air museum with old photos. This helps promote the cultural character of the village and thus its profile as a tourist destination.

Interestingly, the new nonnative residents and temporary residents, especially those from urban centers, often feel more exposed than in the urban environment. “*I feel even more exposed here,*” says the owner of the former Robidišče mountain bike center. In the cities, you can hide in the crowd, and anonymity allows for a certain degree of privacy and invisibility. In Robidišče, where the community is small and close-knit, such anonymity is not possible. Each individual is known and recognized, which creates a sense of greater personal presence. Conversely, being in a smaller, closer-knit environment often leads to a feeling of both inclusion and acceptance or, conversely, exclusion and rejection. People integrate more quickly into the community, build closer interpersonal relationships, and socialize with their neighbors. This sense of belonging and social support can offset or even overcome the benefits of anonymity offered by city life. Conversely, being in such a small and cohesive environment can also increase feelings of marginalization if newcomers are not accepted or have difficulty fitting in. In contrast, the long-established residents do not feel marginalized because they have adapted well to life in this place. Older residents are more critical of marginalization, mainly because they feel forgotten by the land and because they do not have as many opportunities for employment or profitable agricultural activities. Nevertheless, they have developed strong interpersonal ties and independence that allow them to live successfully in such an environment. On the other hand, non-natives living temporarily or newly in Robidišče mainly see the positive aspects of marginalization. For them, living in Robidišče is an escape from everyday life, an opportunity to relax and retreat from the hustle and bustle of the city. They enjoy the peace, nature, and a close-knit community, and they appreciate the opportunity to work remotely or simply enjoy retired life without the stress and hustle and bustle. As one interviewee said, “*Robidišče is isolation par excellence.*” Robidišče is seen as marginalization in its purest form, not necessarily because of its physical remoteness or distance from large cities and infrastructure, but because of the unique interplay of historical, cultural, social, and psychological factors that have shaped its current state. Although it is true that Robidišče is located in a border area and is geographically somewhat removed from urban centers, the marginalization of the village is more a product of historical events, cultural dynamics, and sociopolitical changes than mere physical distance. This marginalization refers not only to physical distance, but also to a way of life that is associated with less connectivity to modern urban centers, limited access to services

and infrastructure, and closer ties to the local community. The term “isolation per se” characterizes Robidišče as a prime example of a place that embodies all the characteristics and consequences of geographical and social marginalization.

Discussion and conclusion

Research on Robidišče offers insights into the complex processes that shape life in marginalized areas and provides important insights into how such communities can develop sustainable solutions to improve quality of life despite their limitations. Marginalization, defined as disconnection from broader social, economic, and political networks, is often an obstacle to development, but at the same time it opens up opportunities for the search for alternative development pathways. Robidišče is an excellent example of how communities can successfully overcome the challenges posed by spatial, economic, and social marginalization and transform these challenges into opportunities for sustainable development.

Although the municipality almost disintegrated after the Second World War, when the new border between Yugoslavia and Italy cut Robidišče off from its natural hinterland in Venetian Slovenia, there have been attempts at revitalization in recent decades that have been crucial to its survival. After the war, many residents emigrated, some homesteads were abandoned, and the population decline was drastic, leading Robidišče into a period of stagnation. Nevertheless, the preservation of the village became the concern of young volunteers that began setting up volunteer work camps and restoring abandoned buildings in the 1990s. These people became the driving force behind the revival. Their energy and commitment provided opportunities to restore the cultural heritage and revitalize the village. Around the same time, municipal support for the restoration of Robidišče increased because the Municipality of Kobarid, together with various organizations, facilitated the revival through cross-border initiatives such as PHARE CBC. This institutional support was key to restoring the basic conditions for life and sustainable development.

Social cohesion in Robidišče is not as strong as one would expect in such a small municipality, partly due to the ongoing population decline and the fact that most current residents are seasonal or weekend residents. Nevertheless, it is these few residents and occasional visitors that have established a network of cooperation and connections that maintains the basic vitality of the village. Despite the remoteness and sense of isolation often attributed to Robidišče, the village’s close historical and cultural ties to the neighboring villages in the Breginj Combe cannot be overlooked. The links to the Breginj Combe are important for social cohesion because they continue to facilitate cooperation, the exchange of resources, and community support. Rodríguez-Pose (2018) emphasizes that even places with limited social cohesion and limited connections to larger social

networks can find opportunities for revitalization through collaboration, as seen in Robidišče through the involvement of volunteers and the organization of cultural events. Local cultural and social resources such as architectural heritage, traditional practices, and social ties between residents have been shown to be key factors in strengthening community resilience. This is confirmed by Gocer et al. (2024), who emphasize the importance of cultural heritage in maintaining local identity and promoting social cohesion.

The development of sustainable tourism based on local natural and cultural resources was an important step in the revitalization of Robidišče. It was supported, among others, by the Municipality of Kobarid and regional organizations such as the Soča Valley Development Center, which facilitated funding and organized projects for the restoration and development of tourist infrastructure. Tourism began to develop more intensively after 2002, when abandoned buildings were restored and basic infrastructure for visitors was created. This opened up new economic opportunities for the residents and raised the profile of the village. However, the uncontrolled development of tourism also brought with it the risk of overloading the area because the growing number of visitors put a strain on the infrastructure and the environment. The findings of Sørensen and Svendsen (2023) confirm that the development of such areas requires careful planning that involves all stakeholders and encourages community participation.

The role of younger generations returning to Robidišče and reintroducing old farming practices is also particularly important. Young people working in tourism and agriculture are an example of the successful combination of tradition and modern sustainable approaches. Their focus on local production, ecologically oriented cuisine, and sustainable tourism not only preserves cultural heritage, but also strengthens the local economy. Such initiatives show that local residents can play a key role in the development of sustainable strategies if they have the support and opportunity to participate in these processes.

The demographic changes in Robidišče show that immigration and seasonal and weekend migration continue to have a significant impact on the vitality of the municipality. The presence of new residents, whether outsiders or weekend returnees that maintain their ties to the village, can have positive effects, such as new ideas and energy for community revitalization. However, it can also lead to feelings of exclusion if these new residents are not sufficiently integrated into local life or accepted by the long-established, which can lead to tensions between locals and newcomers. This ambivalent dynamic is characteristic of many marginalized communities, in which the arrival of new residents can lead to either renewal or conflict. Therefore, involving everyone in the development processes is essential for building a resilient community.

In addition to these social aspects, the infrastructure in Robidišče is key to the long-term sustainability of the village. Challenges such as dependence on Italian water sources, limited access to health services, and poor digital connectivity are significant barriers to further development. It is therefore crucial to improve basic services and

connectivity, which would allow Robidišče to become more integrated into wider economic and social networks. The development of digital infrastructure and improved access to basic services would facilitate the lives of residents, reduce isolation, and allow greater community participation in modern sustainable development trends.

Despite these challenges, Robidišče has successfully transformed its limitations into opportunities for sustainable development. Involving residents in restoration and tourism projects, strengthening social cohesion, developing sustainable tourism, and preserving cultural heritage are key elements that have helped transform Robidišče into a more dynamic and resilient community. At the same time, it is important to maintain a balance between economic development and the preservation of local values to ensure long-term sustainability and improve the quality of life of residents. This represents a holistic approach to the development of marginalized areas, in which the local population plays a key role in decision-making and implementing development measures.

Acknowledgements

This research was financially supported by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency, by the research program Geography of Slovenia: P6-0101, and by the basic research project Isolated People and Communities in Slovenia and Croatia: J6-4610.

References

- Anastasiou, Evgenia, Stella Manika, Konstantina Ragazou, and Ioannis Katsios. 2021. Territorial and Human Geography Challenges: How Can Smart Villages Support Rural Development and Population Inclusion? *Societies* 10 (6): 193. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci10060193>.
- Doyon, Mélanie, Juan-Luis Klein, and Pierre-André Tremblay. 2020. Community Action Against Marginalization: The Case of a Rural Social Enterprise in Quebec. In *Responses to Geographical Marginality and Marginalization*, eds. Etienne Nel, Stanko Pelc, 23–44. Cham: Springer. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-51342-9>.
- Gocer Ozgur, Didem Boyacioglu, Ebru Ergoz Karahan, and Shrestha Pranita. 2024. Cultural Tourism and Rural Community Resilience: A Framework and Its Application. *Journal of Rural Studies* 107. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2024.103238>.
- Heffner, Krystian and Agnieszka Latocha. 2020. Desolated Villages as Examples of Spatial, Economic and Social Marginalization in the Polish-Czech Borderland. In *Responses to Geographical Marginality and Marginalization*, eds. Etienne Nel, Stanko Pelc, 123–142. Cham: Springer. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-51342-9>.
- Kladnik, Drago. 1977. Earthquake Effects on the Example of the Less Developed Area of the Breginj Corner. Thesis, University of Ljubljana. Ljubljana.
- Kravanja, Boštjan. 1999. Najzahodnejša slovenska vas Robidišče: spomini na naš čas. In *Oddaljeni pogledi na Breginjski kot*, eds. Boštjan Kravanja, Petra Kajzer, Melita Škrlec, Marjeta Skrt, and Sergej Ciani. Breginj: ŠKUC.

- Kühn, Manfred. 2015. Peripheralization: Theoretical Concepts Explaining Socio-Spatial Inequalities. *European Planning Studies* 23 (2): 367–378. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2013.862518>.
- Leimgruber, Walter. 1994. Marginality and Marginal Regions: Problems of Definition. In *Marginality and Development Issues in Marginal Regions*, 1–18. Taipei: National Taiwan University.
- Leimgruber, Walter. 2004. *Between Global and Local. Marginality and Marginal Regions in the Context of Globalization and Deregulation*. Oxon, New York: Routledge.
- Mesec, Staša. 2013. Revitalisation of the Mountain Village Robidišče Along the Slovenian-Italian Border. *Trink's Calendar* 55 (1). Cultural Association Ivan Trinko, Cooperative Lipa.
- Mesec, Staša. 2022. *Robidišče 2.2: Vision, Values, Situation, Actions. Starting Points for the Preparation of a Joint Development Strategy for the Village of Robidišče*. Robidišče, 2.2.2022.
- Miklavčič-Brezigar, Inga. 1995. *Robidišče: vas med življenjem in smrtjo ali kako prižgati iskro na ugaslem ognjišču*. Turistično društvo Breginj, Goriški muzej.
- Miklavčič-Brezigar, Inga. 2001. *Robidišče – A Village on the Border. Cultural Heritage and Village Identity*. Nova Gorica.
- Nel, Etienne and Stanko Pelc, eds. 2020. Introduction. Social Innovation and Geographical Marginality. In *Responses to Geographical Marginality and Marginalization*, 1–8, 9–20. Springer. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-51342-9>.
- Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia No. 45/98. 1998. *Act on the Reconstruction of Structures after the Earthquake and the Promotion of Development in Posočje*. Ljubljana: Official Gazette.
- Paniagua, Angel. 2017. Spatial and Individual Resistance(s) in Depopulated and Remote Rural Areas. *Space and Polity* 21 (3): 303–317. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562576.2017.1355874>.
- Pelc, Stanko 2017. Marginality and Marginalization. In *Societies, Social Inequalities and Marginalization*, eds. Raghubir Chand, Etienne Nel, and Stanko Pelc, 1–18. Cham: Springer. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-50998-3_2.
- Pelc, Stanko. 2018. Geography of Marginality. *Geografija v šoli* 26 (1): 8–13. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.59132/geo/2018/1/8-13>.
- Pervez, Ghauri, Xiaolan Fu, and Amorettya Minayora. 2022. Digital Technology-Based Entrepreneurial Pursuit of the Marginalised Communities. *Journal of International Management* 28 (2). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intman.2022.100948>.
- Razpotnik Visković, Nika and Blaž Komac. 2021. Gastronomy Tourism: A Brief Introduction. *Acta Geographica Slovenica* 61 (1). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3986/AGS.10258>.
- Rodríguez-Pose, Andrés. 2018. The Revenge of the Places That Don't Matter (And What to Do About It). *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society* 11 (1): 189–209. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjres/rsx024>.
- Rodríguez-Pose, Andrés. 2020. The Rise of Populism and the Revenge of the Places That Don't Matter. *LSE Public Policy Review* 1 (1). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31389/lseppr.4>.
- Rodríguez-Pose, Andrés, Javier Terrero-Dávila, and Neil Lee. 2023. Left-Behind Versus Unequal Places: Interpersonal Inequality, Economic Decline and the Rise of Populism in the USA and Europe. *Journal of Economic Geography* 23 (5): 951–977. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/jeg/lbad005>.
- Sampson, Kaylene A., Colin G. Goodrich. 2009. Making Place: Identity Construction and Community Formation through “Sense of Place” in Westland, New Zealand. *Society & Natural Resources* 22 (10): 901–915. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08941920802178172>.



- Sørensen, Jens Fyhn Lykke and Gunnar Lind Haase Svendsen. 2023. What Makes Peripheral Places Matter? Applying the Concept of Political Capital Within a Multiple Capital Framework. *Journal of Rural Studies* 103: 103–136. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2023.103136>.
- SiSTAT. 2024. Population Censuses 1869, 1910, 1991, 2000, 2010, 2020, 2023. URL: <https://pxweb.stat.si/SiStatData/pxweb/sl/Data/-/05C5003S.px> (accessed 17.6.2024).
- Stojanović, Vladimir, Jasmina Đorđević, Lazar Lazić, Igor Stamenković, and Vanja Dragičević. 2014. The Principles of Sustainable Development of Tourism in the Special Nature Reserve »Gornje Podunavlje« and Their Impact on the Local Communities. *Acta Geographica Slovenica* 54 (2): 392–400. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3986/AGS54407>.
- Ščukovt, Andrejka. 2016. Village Life on the Border in the Light of the Settlement and Building Development of Robidišče. *Chronicle: Journal of Slovenian Local History* 64 (2): 247–258.
- Ščukovt, Andrejka. 2019. Robidišče – vas na meji. *Goriški letnik: zbornik Goriškega muzeja* 43. Nova Gorica: Goriški muzej.
- Wright, Patrick. 2002. *The Village that Died for England: The Strange Story of Tyneham*. London: Faber.

Revitalizacija Robidišča: premagovanje izzivov in priložnosti obrobnih podeželskih skupnosti

V članku je obravnavana revitalizacija Robidišča, vasi, ki se je spoprijemala z izrazito depopulacijo in gospodarskim nazadovanjem. Z ohranjanjem kulturne dediščine, trajnostnim turizmom in vključevanjem skupnosti je vas dosegla opazen napredek, vendar ostaja niz izzivov, predvsem pri infrastrukturi in vzdržnem razvoju turizma. V raziskavi je bila opravljena analiza, kako so lokalne pobude in zunanja podpora prispevale k večji povezanosti in odpornosti skupnosti. Posebej so poudarjene strategije, ki bi jih lahko uporabili tudi pri drugih obrobnih podeželskih skupnostih.

Robidišče leži na meji z Italijo in je v 20. stoletju doživelo velike spremembe zaradi geopolitičnih premikov, vključno z izgubo stikov z beneškoslovenskim zaledjem po drugi svetovni vojni. Prekinitev vezi je povzročila gospodarski in socialni razkroj, številni prebivalci so se odločili za izselitev. Do leta 2023 se je število prebivalcev zmanjšalo na samo na 17 oseb, le nekaj jih tam prebiva stalno.

V 90. letih prejšnjega stoletja so se začela prizadevanja za revitalizacijo, spodbudili so jih domačini in prostovoljci. Osrednjega pomena je bila organizacija pobude »Ohranimo Robidišče« leta 1995, katere cilj sta bili obnova zapuščenih hiš in oživitve vasi. Podpora institucij, npr. občine Kobarid, in čezmejni projekti, npr. PHARE-CBC, so pomagali pri ponovni povezavi vasi s turističnimi potmi, kar je na območje pripeljalo nove obiskovalce.

Trajnostni turizem je postal glavni dejavnik revitalizacije, saj so bile nekatere zapuščene stavbe obnovljene in preurejene v turistične nastanitve. Kljub temu pa težave z infrastrukturo – nestabilna oskrba z vodo, pomanjkanje kanalizacijskega sistema in slabo vzdrževanje cest – še vedno niso rešene. Poleg tega je nenadzorovana rast turizma, zlasti med pandemijo covid-19, preobremenila lokalno infrastrukturo, kar je pri prebivalcih povzročilo skrb zaradi čezmernega turizma.

Raziskava prav tako poudarja osrednji pomen krajevne kulturne dediščine pri krepitvi družbene povezanosti in identitete skupnosti. Številni povratniki in njihovi potomci so dejavno sodelovali pri obnovi vasi, denarno in z delom. Razvoj projektov, ki jih vodi skupnost, npr. male kmetije in lokalne turistične pobude, je prispeval k vzdržnejšemu krajevnemu gospodarstvu.

Kljub uspehom ostajajo izzivi. Razvoj so upočasnile zapletene lastniške razmere in nepripravljenost domačinov, da bi nepremičnine prodali novim priseljencem. Nekatera območja so še vedno zaraščena in zanemarjena. Infrastruktura, predvsem digitalna povezljivost in oskrba z vodo, pa zahteva izboljšave za podporo nadaljnji rasti.

Primer Robidišča priča o potencialu revitalizacije podeželja s kombinacijo lokalnih prizadevanj, zunanje podpore in trajnostnega razvoja turizma. Izkušnja vasi ponuja poduke, ki bi jih lahko uporabili v podobnih skupnostih na obrobjih: pomen uravnoteženja gospodarskega razvoja z ohranjanjem kulturnih in naravnih virov ter vrednost sodelovanja skupnosti pri procesih odločanja.



Lockdown Friend

Hello my friend
I see you there and then
myself

annoying

I want you here but
all I can
is draw some lines and scratch the waves
so blue, so whole, one moment

I look and almost catch your eye, a net across the water
fish jump and turn and gasp for air
and people tumble
over

Maruška Svašek

Lockdown Friend

Maruška Svašek

Queen's University Belfast, United Kingdom

m.svasek@qub.ac.uk

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1523-0445>

Ethnographic statement

During the pandemic, confronted with the “crisolation” (Podjed, 2024) of the first lockdown, I turned like many others to Skype, Zoom, and Teams to connect with distant relatives, friends, and interlocutors (Podjed, 2021; Svašek, 2022). Experimenting with various modes of digital hanging out, I began to paint the computer-mediated interactions (Svašek, 2023a, 2023b). The paintings explored the online relationality of pandemic life and were realized through concentrated bodily attention to the social dynamics of long-distance co-presence. While newly developed, the method of long-distance painting drew on pre-pandemic work by anthropologists who used sketching, painting, and graphic storytelling to reach broader audiences (Collordo-Mansfield, 1993; Afonso, 2004; Ramos, 2004, 2018; Causey, 2017; Dix, Kaur, 2019; Hurdley, 2019; Jain, 2021; Haapio-Kirk, Cearns, n.d.).

About a year after the completion of the paintings, I began adding poetic reflections. *Lockdown Friend* explores an encounter with one of my friends in the Netherlands in 2020. The picture visualizes the momentary link between our distant homes, connecting the two locations through wavy pen strokes. The accompanying poem expresses the sense of frustration I felt because of our inability to physically meet, and the last stanza refers to the deeply disturbing situation in which the infection and mortality rates rapidly increased across the world. As a united piece, the painting-poem is a focal point for imagination and free association between words and shapes.

References

- Afonso, Ana Isabel. 2004. New Graphics of Old Stories: Representation of Local Memories Through Drawings. In *Working Images: Visual Research and Representation in Ethnography*, eds. A. I. Afonso, L. Kürti, and S. Pink, 72–89. London: Routledge.
- Causey, Andrew. 2017. *Drawn to See: Drawing as an Ethnographic Method*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.
- Collordo-Mansfield, Rudi. 1993. The Value of Sketching in Field Research. *Anthropology*, U.C.L.A. 20: 89–104.

- Dix, Benjamin and Raminder Kaur. 2019. Drawing-Writing Culture: The Truth-Fiction Spectrum of an Ethno-Graphic Novel on the Sri-Lankan Civil War and Migration. *Visual Anthropology Review* 35 (1): 76–111. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/var.12172>.
- Haapio-Kirk, Laura and Jennifer Cearns. n.d. *Illustrating Anthropology*. URL: <https://illustratinganthropology.com> (accessed 24.1.2023).
- Hurdley, Rachel. 2019. Drawing as a Research Method. In *Sage Research Methods*, eds. P. Atkinson, S. Delamont, A. Cernat, J. W. Sakshaug, and R. A. Williams. London: Sage. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526421036838861>.
- Jain, Lochlann. 2021. Graphic Poesis: Drawing Things to Other. *Commoning Ethnography* 14 (1): 53–78. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26686/ce.v4i1.5202>.
- Podjed, Dan. 2021. Renewal of Ethnography in the Time of the COVID-19 Crisis. *Sociologija i prostor* 59 (219): 267–284. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5673/sip.59.0.10>.
- Podjed, Dan. 2024. *Krizolacija: Znanstveno branje o izoliranih ljudeh* [Crisolation: A Science Story of Isolated People]. Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, Cankarjeva založba.
- Ramos, Manuel João. 2004. Drawing the Lines: The Limitations of Intercultural Ekphrasis. In *Working Images: Visual Research and Representation in Ethnography*, eds. S. Pink, L. Kürti, and A. I. Afonso, 147–161. London: Routledge.
- Ramos, Manuel João. 2018. *Of Hairy Kings and Sainly Slaves: An Ethiopian Travelogue*. Canon Pyon: Sean Kingston.
- Svašek, Maruška. 2022. Lockdown Routines: Im/mobility, Materiality and Mediated Support at the Time of the Pandemic. In *Material Culture and Forced Migration: Materializing the Transient*, eds. F. Yi-Neumann, A. Lauser, A. Fuhse, and P. Bräunlein, 229–250. London: University College London.
- Svašek, Maruška. 2023a. Ethnography as Creative Improvisation: Exploring Methods in (Post) Pandemic Times. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1086/725341>.
- Svašek, Maruška. 2023b. Pandemic Times: Nine Acts. *Anthropology and Humanism* 48 (2): 333–345. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/anh.12442>.



TRADITIONES

DITTI

TT

OBRAZI IZOLACIJE THE FACES OF ISOLATION

Dan Podjed, Lana Peternel, The Power of Isolation (*Moč izolacije*)

Špela Ledinek Lozej, Isolation and Connectedness in the Bohinj Alps:
Experiences of a *Majerca* (*Izolacija in povezljivost v bohinjskih planinah:
izkušnje majerce*)

Nikolina Hazdovac Bajić, Floating Homes: Homemaking Practices
among Seafarers as Strategies against Isolation (*Plavajoči domovi: prakse
ustvarjanja doma med pomorščaki kot protiizolacijske strategije*)

Peter Simonič, The Island of Žirje: Challenging Claims of Isolation
(*Otok Žirje: spodbijanje trditev o izolaciji*)

Ana Perinić Lewis, Connected by Sea, Isolated by Water: Water and Water
Supply Infrastructure on Two Croatian Islands (*Povezani z vodo, izolirani
zaradi vode: voda in oskrba z vodo na dveh hrvaških otokih*)

Katarina Polajnar Horvat, Revitalizing Robidišče: Navigating the
Challenges and Opportunities of Marginalized Rural Communities
(*Revitalizacija Robidišča: premagovanje izzivov in priložnosti obrobnih
podeželskih skupnosti*)

Maruška Svašek, Lockdown Friend (*Lockdown Friend*)

ISSN 0352-0447



9 770352 044014



ZRC SAZU

